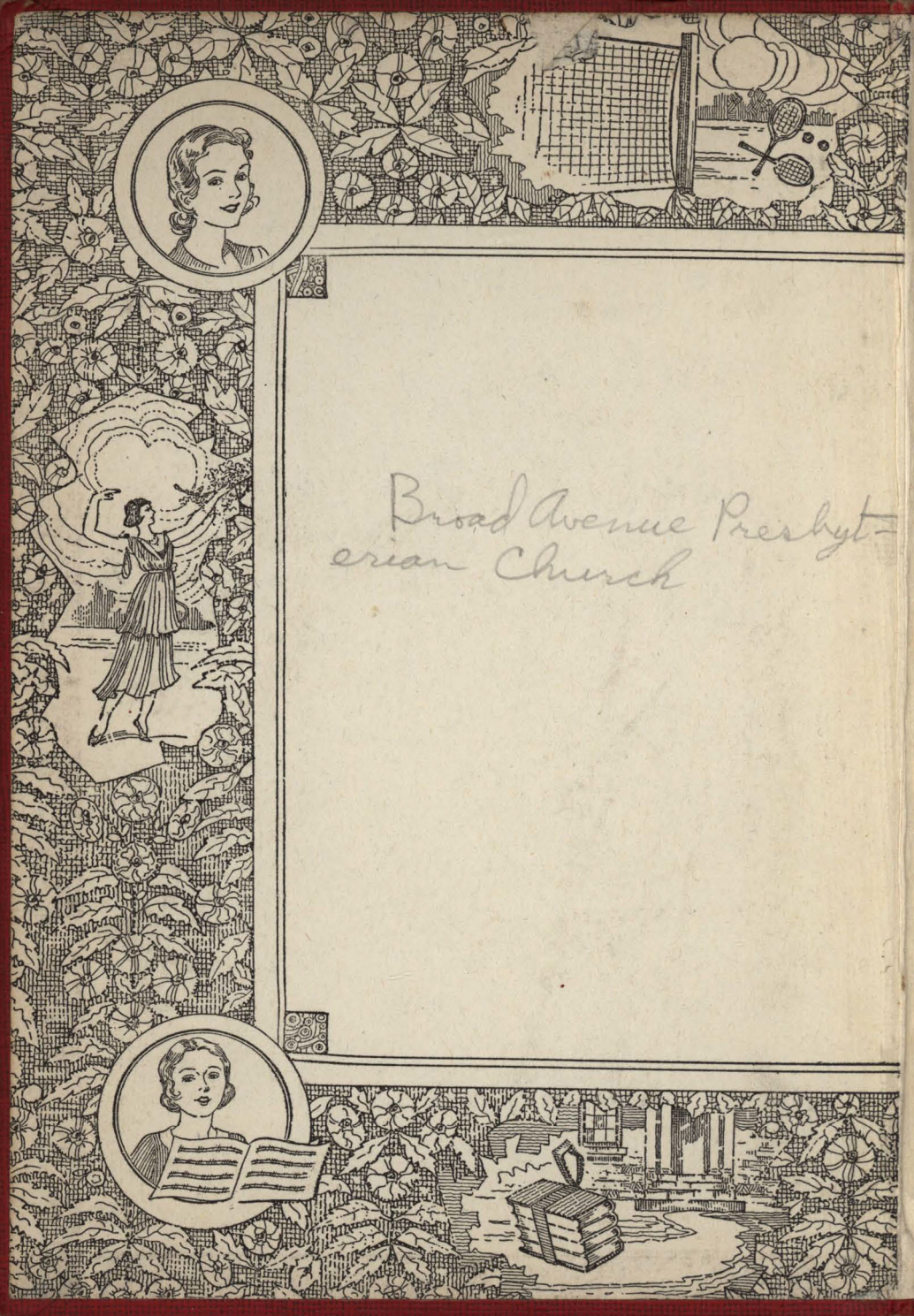
GHOST BEYOND *the* GATE

MILDRED A. WIRT



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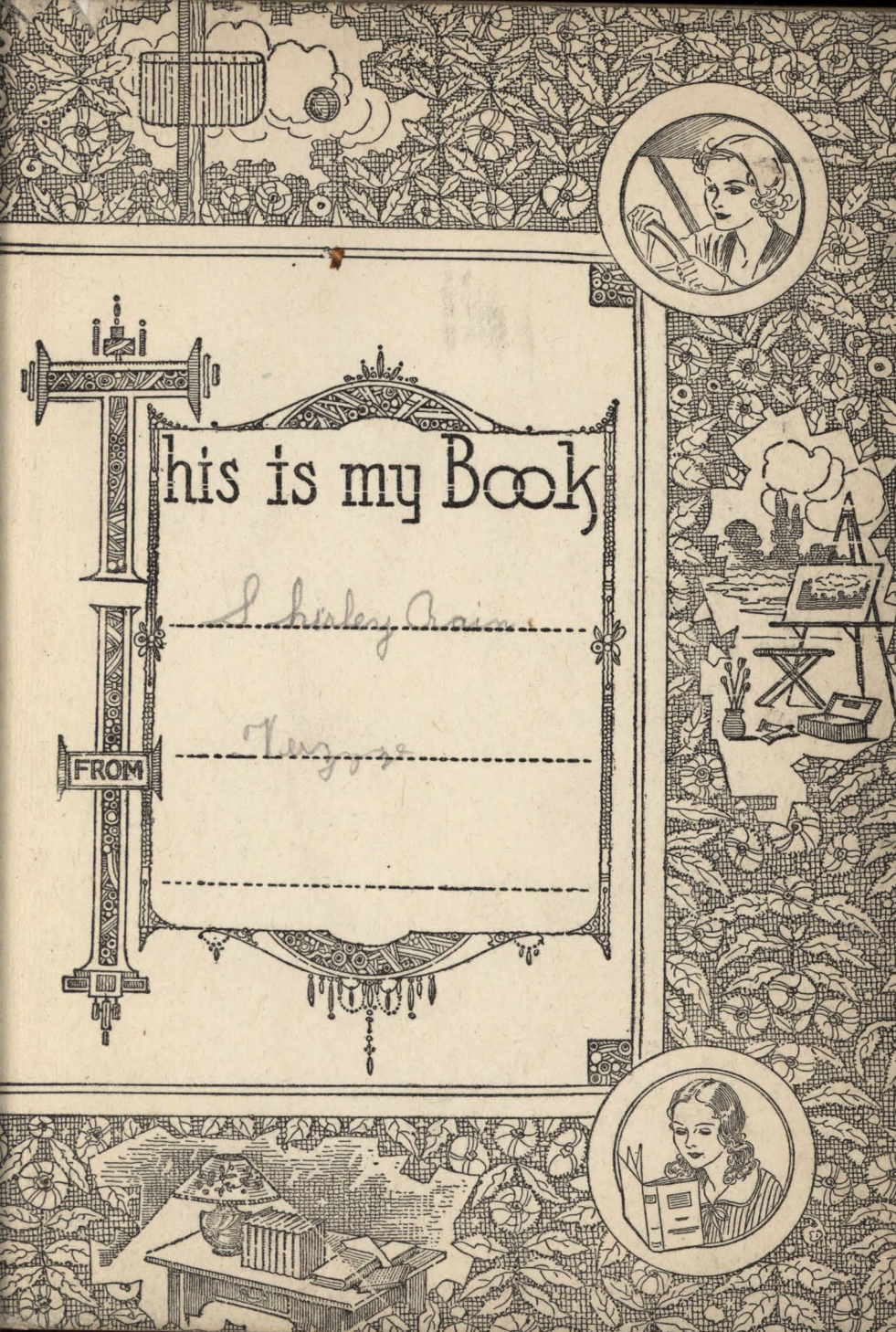
This is my Book
FROM

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HER FEET WENT OUT FROM UNDER HER AND SHE WAS DRAGGED OVER THE ICE.

Ghost Beyond the Gate

(See page 195)

Ghost Beyond the Gate

By

MILDRED A. WIRT

Author of

MILDRED A. WIRT MYSTERY STORIES
PENNY PARKER MYSTERY STORIES

Illustrated

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PENNY PARKER

MYSTERY STORIES

TALE OF THE WITCH DOLL
THE VANISHING HOUSEBOAT
DANGER AT THE DRAWBRIDGE
BEHIND THE GREEN DOOR
CLUE OF THE SILKEN LADDER
THE SECRET PACT
THE CLOCK STRIKES THIRTEEN
THE WISHING WELL
SABOTEURS ON THE RIVER
GHOST BEYOND THE GATE

Other Titles in Preparation

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Ghost Beyond the Gate

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CHAPTER

1

LOST ON A HILLTOP

THE LITTLE iceboat, with two laughing, shouting girls clinging to it, sped over the frozen surface of Big Bear River.

"Penny, we're going too fast!" screamed Louise Sidell, ducking to protect her face from the biting wind.

"Only about forty an hour!" shrieked her companion gleefully.

At the tiller of the *Icicle*, Penelope Parker, in fur-lined parka, sheepskin coat and goggles, looked for all the world like a jolly Eskimo. Always delighting in a new sport, she had built the iceboat herself—spars from a wood lot, the sail from an old tent.

"Slow down, Penny!" pleaded her chum.

"Can't," shouted Penny cheerfully. "Oh, we're going into a hike!"

As one runner raised off the ice, the boat tilted far over on its side. Louise shrieked with terror, and held tight to prevent being thrown out. Penny, hard

pressed, sought to avert disaster by a snappy starting of the main sheet.

For a space the boat rushed on, runners roaring. Then as a sudden puff of wind struck the sail, the steering runner leaped off the ice. Instantly the *Icicle* went into a spin from which Penny could not straighten it.

"We're going over!" screamed Louise, scrambling to free her feet.

The next moment the boat capsized. Both girls went sliding on their backs across the ice. Penny landed in a snowdrift at the river bank, her parka awry, goggles hanging on one ear.

"Are you hurt, Lou?" she called, jumping to her feet.

Louise sprawled on the ice some distance away. Slowly she pulled herself to a sitting position and rubbed the back of her head.

"Maybe this is your idea of fun!" she complained. "As for me, give me bronco busting! It would be a mild sport in comparison."

Penny chuckled, dusting snow from her clothing. "Why, this is fun, Lou. We have to expect these little upsets while we're learning."

The sail of the overturned iceboat was billowing like a parachute. Slipping and sliding, Penny ran to pull it in.

"Take the old thing down!" urged Louise, hobbling

after her. "I've had enough ice-boating for this afternoon!"

"Oh, just one more turn down the river and back," coaxed Penny.

"No! We're close to the club house now. If we sail off again, there's no telling where we'll land. Anyway, it's late and it's starting to snow."

Penny reluctantly acknowledged that Louise spoke pearls of wisdom. Large, damp snowflakes were drifting down, dotting her red mittens. The wind steadily was stiffening, and cold penetrated her sheepskin coat.

"It will be dark within an hour," added Louise. Uneasily she scanned the leaden sky. "We've been out here all afternoon."

"Guess it is time to go home," admitted Penny. "Oh, well, it won't take us long to get the *Icicle* loaded onto the car trailer. Lucky we upset so close to the club house."

Setting to work with a will, the girls took down the flapping sail. After much tugging and pushing, they righted the boat and pulled it toward the Riverview Yacht Club. Closed for the winter, the building looked cold and forlorn. Penny, however, had left her car in the snowy parking lot, which was convenient to the river.

"Wish we could get warm somewhere," Louise said, shivering. "It must be ten below zero."

Pulling the *Icicle* behind them, the girls climbed the slippery river bank. Snow now swirled in clouds, half-curtaining the club house.

"I'll get the car and drive it down here," Penny offered, starting toward the parking lot. "No use dragging the boat any farther."

Abandoning the *Icicle*, Louise went with her chum. A dozen steps took the girls to a wind-swept corner of the deserted building. Rounding it, they both stopped short, staring.

On the snow-banked parking lot where the car had been left, there now stood only one vehicle, an unpainted, two-wheel trailer.

"Great fishes!" exclaimed Penny. "Where's the coupe?"

"Maybe you forgot to set the brake and it rolled into a ditch!"

"In that case, the trailer would have gone with it." Her face grim, Penny ran on toward the parking lot.

Reaching the trailer, the girls saw by tire tracks in the snow that the car had been detached and driven away.

"I knew it! I knew it!" Penny wailed, pounding her mittens together. "The coupe's been stolen!"

"What's that across the road?" Louise demanded. "It looks like an automobile to me. In the ditch, too!"

Taking new hope, Penny went to investigate the

little ravine. Through a screen of bare tree branches and bushes, she glimpsed a blur of metal.

"It's the car!" she cried jubilantly. "But how did it get across the road?"

Penny's elation quickly died. Drawing nearer, she was dismayed to see that the coupe appeared to be lying on its stomach in the ditch. Four wheels and a spare had been removed.

"Stripped of every tire!" she exclaimed. "The thief ran the car out here on the road so we couldn't see him at work from the river!"

"What are we going to do?" Louise asked weakly. "We're miles from Riverview. No houses close by. We're half frozen and night is coming on."

Penny, her face very long, had no answer. She measured the gasoline tank with a stick. All of the fuel had been siphoned. She lifted the hood, expecting to find vital parts of the engine missing. However, everything appeared to be in place.

Seeking protection from the penetrating wind, the girls climbed into the car to discuss their situation.

"Can't we just wait here until someone comes along and gives us a lift to town?" suggested Louise.

"Yes, but we're on a side road and few cars travel this way during winter."

"Then why not go somewhere and telephone?"

"The nearest stores are at Kamm's corner, about two miles away."

Louise gazed thoughtfully at the soft snow which was banking deeper on the windshield of the car.

"Two miles in this, facing the wind, will be a hard hike. Think we ought to try it, Penny?"

"I'm sure I don't want to. And we needn't either! Do you remember Salt Sommers?"

"The photographer who works on your father's newspaper?"

"Yes, he spends his spare time as an airplane spotter. His station is over in the hills not more than a half mile from here! Why not tramp over there and ask him to telephone our folks?"

"Are you sure you know the way?"

"I was there once last summer," Penny said confidently. "One follows a side road through the woods. I'm sure I can find it."

"All right," Louise consented, sliding from behind the steering wheel. "If we're going, let's move right along."

Stiff with cold, the girls trudged past the club house and on down the road. Snow was falling faster and faster. Several times they paused to wipe their frosted goggles.

"This promises to be a man-sized blizzard," Louise observed uneasily. "It's getting dark early, too."

Penny nodded, her thoughts on what she would say to her father when she reached home. The car had been fully insured, but even so it would not be

easy to replace five stolen tires. Ruefully she reflected that Mrs. Weems, the kindly housekeeper who had looked after her since her mother's death, had not favored the river trip.

"Oh, don't take it so hard," Louise tried to cheer her. "Maybe the thief will be caught."

"Not a chance of it," Penny responded gloomily.

A hundred yards farther on the girls came to another side road which wound upward through the wooded hills. Already there was an ominous dusk settling over the valley. Penny paused to take bearings.

"I think this is the way," she said doubtfully.

"You think!"

"Well, I'm pretty sure," Penny amended. "Salt's station is up there on top of one of those hills. If this snow would stop we should be able to see the tower from here."

Slightly reassured, Louise followed her chum across a wooden bridge and up a narrow, winding road. On either side of the frozen ditches, tall frosted evergreens provided friendly protection from the stabbing, icy wind. Nevertheless, walking was not easy for the roadbed bore a shell of treacherous ice.

Confident that they soon would come to the airplane listening post, the girls trudged on. Penny, anxious to make the most of the remaining daylight, set a stiff pace.

"Shouldn't we be coming to the station?" Louise presently asked. "Surely we've gone more than a half mile."

"The post is a little ways off from the road," Penny confessed, peering anxiously at the unbroken line of evergreens. "We should be able to see it."

"In this blinding snow? Why, we may have passed the station without knowing it."

"Well, I don't think so."

"You're not one bit sure, Penny Parker!" Louise accused. "We were crazy to start off without being certain of the post's location."

"We always can go back to the car."

"I'm nearly frozen now," Louise complained, slapping her mittens together. "There's no feeling in one of my hands."

Penny paused to wipe the moisture from her goggles. From far down the road came the sound of a laboring motor. She listened hopefully.

"A car, Lou!" she cried. "Everything will be all right now! We'll hail it and ask the driver for a lift."

Greatly encouraged, the girls waited for the approaching vehicle. They could hear it climbing a steep knoll, then descending. From the sound of the engine they decided that it must be a truck and that it might round the curve at a fast speed.

Worried lest the driver fail to see them, the girls stepped out into the middle of the road. As the truck

swerved around the bend, they shouted and waved their arms.

The startled driver slammed on brakes, causing the big black truck to slide like a sled. Penny and Louise leaped aside, barely avoiding being struck.

As they watched anxiously, the driver recovered control of the machine. He straightened out and brought the truck to a standstill farther up the road.

Penny seized her chum's hand. "Come on, Lou! He's going to give us a ride!"

Before they could reach the truck, the driver lowered the cab window. Thrusting his head through the opening he bellowed angrily:

"What you tryin' to do? Wreck my truck?"

Giving the girls no opportunity to reply, he closed the cab window.

Penny saw that the man was intending to drive on. "Wait!" she called frantically. "Please give us a ride! We're lost and half frozen!"

The man heard for he flashed an ugly smile. Shifting gears, he drove away.

"Of all the shabby tricks, that's the worst!" Penny said furiously. "It wasn't our fault his old truck skidded."

"But it is our fault we're lost on this road," Louise added. "How are we ever to find the listening post?"

Penny leaned against the leeward side of a giant pine. Already it was so dark that she could see only

a few feet down the road. There were no houses, no lights, nothing to guide her.

"Penny, are we really lost?" Louise demanded, suddenly afraid.

"We really, truly are," her chum answered in a quavering voice. "The post must be somewhere near here, but we'll never find it. All we can do is try to get back to the car."

CHAPTER

2

AT THE LISTENING POST

PENNY'S COURAGE did not long forsake her. She had suggested to Louise that they return to the stripped car, but she knew that would not solve their problem. Staring up the dark road, she remarked that they must be close to the summit of the hill.

"Then why not keep on?" urged Louise. "We set out to find the listening post, so let's do it!"

They trudged on up the winding road. At intervals, in an attempt to restore circulation to numbed feet, they ran a few steps. Snow fell steadily, whipping and stinging their faces.

Gasping, half-winded, they kept doggedly on. Finally they struggled into a clearing at the top of the hill. Penny wiped her eyes and gazed down through a gap in the white-coated evergreens. A quarter of the way down the slope on the other side appeared a glowing dot of light.

"I'm afraid it's only a cabin," she said dubiously. "It can't be the airplane listening post."

"Let's go there anyway," advised Louise. "We can warm ourselves and ask how to get back to civilization."

They pushed on, still following the road. Downhill walking was much easier and at intervals they were encouraged by a glimpse of the light.

Then, rounding a bend of the road, the girls came to an artistic, newly constructed iron fence, banked heavily with snow. The fence led to a high gate, and behind the gate loomed a dark, sprawling house with double chimneys.

"The place is deserted!" Louise observed in disappointment. "What became of the light we've been following?"

"It must be farther on. This house looks as if it had been closed for the winter."

Penny went to the gate and rattled a heavy chain which held it in place. Peering through the palings, she could see an unshoveled driveway which curved gracefully to a pillared porch. The spacious grounds were dotted with evergreens and shrubs, so layered with snow that they resembled scraggly ghosts.

"Wonder who owns this place?" speculated Louise.

"Don't know," Penny answered, turning away. "In fact, I don't recall ever having seen it before."

Her words carried special significance to Louise.

"If you've never seen this house before, then we're on a strange road! Penny, we never will find the listening post!"

"I'm beginning to suspect it myself," Penny admitted grimly. "But we must keep plodding on. That light can't be far ahead."

Turning their backs upon the gloomy estate, they again braved the penetrating wind. Soon Louise lost her footing and fell. She remained in a dispirited little heap until Penny pulled her off the ice.

"Let's keep going, Lou," she urged. "It won't be long now."

Louise allowed Penny to pull her along. They rounded a curve in the road, and there, miraculously, the lighted cabin rose before them.

"At last!" exulted Louise. "The Promised Land!"

Staggering up a shoveled path, they pounded on the cabin door. An old man, who held a kerosene lamp, responded promptly.

"Come in, come in!" he invited heartily. "Why, you look half frozen."

"Looks aren't deceitful either," Penny laughed shakily.

As the girls went into the warm room a little whirlpool of wind and snow danced ahead of them. Quickly the old man closed the door. He made places for Penny and Louise at the stove and tossed in a heavy stick of wood.

"Bad night to be out," he commented cheerfully.

Penny agreed that it was. "We're lost," she volunteered, stripping off her wet mittens. "At least we can't find the airplane listening post."

"Why, it's just a piece farther on," the old man replied. "The tower's right hard to see in this storm."

While they thawed out, the girls explained that they had been forced to abandon their car at the Riverview Yacht Club. The old man, whose name was Henry Hammill, listened with deep sympathy to their tale of woe.

"I'll hitch up my horses and take you to Riverview in the sled," he offered. "That is, unless you'd rather stop at the listening tower."

"It would save you a long trip," Penny returned politely. "If Salt Sommers is on duty, I'm sure he'll take us to our homes."

In the end it was decided that Old Henry should drive the girls as far as the post. Then, if arrangements could not be made with the photographer, he would keep on to Riverview.

Warm at last, Penny and Louise declared that they were ready to start. Old Henry brought the sled to the door and the team soon was racing down the icy road. Above the jingle of bells arose occasional squeals of laughter, for the young passengers enjoyed every minute of the unexpected ride.

Presently Old Henry pulled up at the side of the road.

"There's the tower," he said, pointing to a two-story wooden observatory rising above the evergreens. "I'll wait until you find out if your friend's here."

The girls thanked the old man for his kindly help and scrambled from the sled. They were sure their troubles were over, for they could see Salt Sommers seated at a table in the lighted tower.

A flight of steps led to a narrow catwalk which ran around three sides of the glass-enclosed house. Before Penny and Louise could hammer on the door Salt opened it.

"Well, see what the storm blew in!" the young man exclaimed. "I didn't expect you girls to pop in on a night like this."

"Salt, how soon will you be driving to Riverview?" Penny asked breathlessly.

"About twenty minutes. As soon as my relief shows up."

"May we ride with you?"

"Why, sure."

Penny called down from the catwalk to tell Old Henry he need not wait. With a friendly wave of his hand, the cabin owner drove away. The girls then followed Salt into the drafty tower room.

Curiously they gazed at their surroundings. In the center of the room stood a small coal stove. Above it a tacked sign admonished: "Keep this fire going!" There was a table, two chairs and a telephone. Also a round clock which indicated seven-forty.

Before Penny and Louise could explain why they had come, Salt held up a warning finger.

"Listen!" he exclaimed. "Wasn't that a plane?"

He ran out on the catwalk, letting in an icy blast of wind. In a moment he came back, grinning sheepishly.

"A passenger airplane is due through here about this time. Sometimes I listen for it so hard I imagine the sound of the engine."

"The job must get tiresome at times," Penny ventured, making herself comfortable by the glowing stove.

"Oh, it does, but I'm glad to serve my trick. What brings you girls here on such a wild night?"

The story was quickly told. Nevertheless, by the time Penny had telephoned to Mrs. Weems, it was after eight o'clock. Footsteps pounded on the stairway. An elderly man, his hat and overcoat encrusted with snow, swept into the room.

"My relief," said Salt, presenting Nate Adams to the girls. "I'm free to shove off now."

"Hope you can start your car," commented the newcomer. "It's mighty cold, and the temperature is still dropping."

Salt's battered coupe was parked not far from the tower. Snow blanketed the windshield. He wiped it away and after several attempts started the engine.

"Think I'd better stop at the first garage and have

more alcohol put in the radiator. No use in taking a chance."

Salt followed the same road over which the girls had trudged an hour earlier. In passing the estate not far from Old Henry's cabin, Penny peered with renewed interest at the big house. In the blinding snow storm she could not be sure, but she thought a light gleamed from an upstairs window.

"Salt," she inquired, "who lives in that place?"

"Can't tell you," he replied, without turning his head.

"Does anyone live there now?"

"Haven't seen anyone since I took over as observer at the tower. Nate Adams tells me the estate has a private air field. No planes have taken off or landed while I've been on duty."

"I thought I saw a light just now in an upstairs window."

"Probably a reflection from the car headlights," Salt answered carelessly.

The car passed Old Henry's cabin and crept on until it came to a crossroad. Several buildings were clustered on either side of the main highway.

"Guess I'll stop at Mattie's garage," Salt said.

As he pulled up on a gravel runway, a masculine looking woman came to the door of the car. She was in her mid-thirties and wore a man's coat much too large for her. The girls guessed, and correctly, that

she was Mattie Williams, owner of the garage and filling station.

"How many will you have?" she asked Salt, briskly clearing the windshield of snow.

The photographer replied that he did not require gasoline, but wanted at least a quart of alcohol.

"Drive into the garage," the woman instructed, opening a pair of double doors. "I'll have Sam take care of it."

As the car rolled into the building, Mattie shouted loudly to a stoop-shouldered man who was busy in the rear office: "Hey, Sam! Look after this customer, will you?"

Sam Burkholder slouched over to the car and began to unscrew the radiator cap. Penny and Louise assumed that the man must be Mattie's husband, but a remark to that effect was corrected by Salt.

"Sam is Mattie's partner," he explained in an undertone. "It's hard to tell which one of them is boss of the place."

Losing interest in the pair, Penny and Louise climbed out of the coupe. They had noticed a cafe next door and thought they might go there for a cup of hot coffee.

"Go ahead," Salt encouraged. "I'll stay here until this job is finished, and join you."

As the girls let themselves out the garage door, a truck pulled up in front of the cafe. They would

have given it no more than a casual glance had not the driver alighted. He was a short, ruddy-faced man with a missing front tooth which made his facial expression rather grotesque. Without glancing at the girls, he entered the restaurant.

"That man!" exclaimed Louise. "Haven't we seen him somewhere?"

"We have indeed," agreed Penny grimly. "He's the same driver who refused us a ride. Let's march in there and give him a piece of our minds!"

CHAPTER

3

AN UNPLEASANT DRIVER

FROM OUTSIDE the lighted cafe, the girls could see the truck driver slouched at one of the counter stools.

"I'm willing to go inside," said Louise, "but why start a fuss? After all, I suppose he had a right to refuse us a ride."

"We might have frozen to death!"

"Well, he probably didn't realize we were lost."

"I wish I had your charitable disposition," Penny said with a sniff. "He heard me shout, and he drove away just to be mean."

"Anyway, let's forget it."

Louise took Penny's elbow, steering her toward the cafe. The girls had been friends since grade school days. They made an excellent pair, for Louise exerted a subduing effect upon her impulsive chum.

The only daughter of Anthony Parker, publisher

of the *Star*, Penny had a talent for innocently getting into trouble. Inactivity bored her. When nothing more exciting offered, she frequently tried her hand at writing stories for her father's newspaper. Such truly important yarns as *The Vanishing Houseboat*, *The Wishing Well*, *Behind the Green Door*, and *The Clock Strikes Thirteen* had rolled from her typewriter. Penny thoroughly enjoyed reportorial work, but best of all she loved to take an active part in the adventures she recounted.

"Now remember," Louise warned her, "not a word to that truck driver. We'll just snub him."

"Oh, all right. I'll try to behave myself."

Grinning, Penny allowed herself to be guided toward the restaurant. Near the doorway they came to the parked truck, and noticed that it was loaded with large wooden boxes.

"War equipment," commented Penny.

"How do you know?"

"Why, the boxes are unmarked except by numerals. Haven't you noticed, Lou, that's the way machines and materials are transported to and from factories. It's done so no one can tell what's inside."

Penny opened the door and they went into the warm, smoky cafe. As they seated themselves at a table the driver glanced toward them, but seemingly without recognition.

"How about a date tonight, Baby?" he asked the waitress.

Without replying, the girl slapped a menu card on the counter in front of him.

"High toned, ain't you?" he chuckled.

"What will it be?" the waitress demanded impatiently.

"How about a nice smile, Baby?"

Turning away, the waitress started to serve another customer.

"Gimme a cup o' coffee and two sinkers," the driver hurled after her. "And make it snappy too! I'm in a hurry."

Once the coffee and doughnuts had been set before him, the man was in no haste to consume them. He read a newspaper and fed a dollar and a half into a pin-ball machine.

Penny and Louise ordered coffee. Knowing that Salt might be waiting for them, they swallowed the brew scalding hot and arose to leave.

At the cashier's desk Penny paid the bill. Upon impulse she quietly asked the man behind the cash register if he knew the driver.

"Fellow by the name of Hank Biglow," he answered.

Before Penny could ask another question, a police patrol car screeched to a standstill just outside the restaurant. The cafe owner turned to stare as did the driver.

"What are those cops comin' here for?" Hank Biglow demanded.

"How should I know?" retorted the cafe owner. "Maybe they want to ask you a few questions about that cargo you carry!"

"What do you mean by that crack?" the driver asked harshly.

As the cashier shrugged and did not reply, Hank allowed the matter to pass. Although he remained at the counter, he kept watching the police car through the window.

The brief interchange between cafe owner and driver had interested Penny. To delay her departure, she bought a candy bar and began to unwrap it.

Only one policeman had alighted from the car. Tramping into the cafe, he pounded his hands together and sought the warmth of a radiator.

"Mind if I have a little of your heat?" he asked the cafe owner.

"Help yourself."

Penny had been watching Hank Biglow. A moment before the man had sat tense and nervous at the counter. Now he seemed completely relaxed and at ease as he sipped his coffee.

"Hello, Hank," the policeman greeted him. "Didn't see you at first. How's the trucking business?"

"Okay," the trucker growled. "Workin' me night and day."

The casual conversation disappointed Penny. Her

first thought had been that Hank Biglow feared a police investigation. Seemingly, she had indulged in wishful thinking.

Having no further reason for remaining in the cafe, the girls stepped out into the storm.

"A pity that policeman wasn't looking for Hank Biglow," Penny muttered.

"I thought for a minute he was," responded Louise, stooping to fasten the buckle of her heavy overshoe. "At least Hank acted peculiar."

"You heard what the cashier said to him?"

"About the cargo he carried?"

"Yes," nodded Penny, "what do you suppose he meant?"

"Don't you think it was intended as a joke?"

"It didn't seem that way to me, Lou. Hank took offense at the remark. He was as nervous as a cat, too."

Penny stared curiously at the big truck which was parked not far from the police car.

"I wonder what can be in those big boxes, Lou?"

"A few minutes ago you said they contained tools or defense plant products."

"That was only my guess. I assumed it from the lack of marking on the boxes."

Penny paused beside the big truck. Pressing her face close to an opening between the slats, she counted ten large crates, all the same size and shape.

"Lou, maybe this isn't defense plant merchandise," she speculated. "Maybe it's some sort of contraband. . . ."

Penny's words trailed off. Someone had touched her on the shoulder.

Whirling around, she faced the same policeman who a moment before had entered the cafe.

"What do you think you're doing?" he inquired.

"Why, just looking," stammered Penny. "We were wondering what's inside these boxes."

"Machinery," replied the policeman. "Now skidoo! Behave yourselves or I'll have to speak to your parents."

CHAPTER

4

STOLEN TIRES

"WE'RE VERY sorry," Louise apologized to the policeman. "We didn't suppose it would do any harm to look at the outside of the boxes."

"Run along, run along," the officer said impatiently.

Penny was tempted to make a rather pointed remark, but Louise pulled her away.

"Never argue with a policeman," she whispered. "You always lose."

"We weren't doing any harm," Penny scowled. "What does he think we are, a couple of female spies?"

Entering the garage, the girls saw that the car had been serviced. Salt could be seen inside the little glass-enclosed office.

"I'm waiting for Sam Burkholder," he explained as they joined him. "He took care of the radiator and then disappeared."

Penny and Louise loitered about the office, reading the evening newspaper. After a little delay, Mattie Williams appeared.

"Can you give me my bill?" Salt requested. "We're in a hurry to get to Riverview."

"I thought Sam was looking after you," Mattie replied, making out the slip.

The bill settled, Salt backed the car from the garage. Penny noticed that Hank Biglow's truck no longer stood in front of the cafe. The police car also had gone. She would have thought no more of it, had not Louise at that moment exclaimed:

"Penny, that truck is parked at the rear of the garage now! And they're unloading the boxes!"

Penny twisted around to see for herself. It was true that the big truck had been backed up close to the rear entrance of the garage. Through the blinding snow, she could just see Hank Biglow and Sam Burkholder carrying one of the boxes into the building.

"Well, that's funny!" she exclaimed. "Those crates can't contain defense machinery or materials. Otherwise Hank wouldn't be delivering them here."

"What crates?" inquired Salt, shifting gears.

Penny told him what had transpired in the cafe, and revealed that she and Louise had been rebuked by the policeman. Salt, occupied with driving, did not consider the incident in any way significant.

"Oh, you know how some cops are," he commented carelessly.

The car went into a wild skid and Salt thereafter devoted his attention strictly to driving.

Without further mishap, the party arrived safely at Riverview. Louise alighted at her own home, and then Salt took Penny to the Parker residence.

"Won't you come in for a cup of chocolate?" she invited.

"Thanks, not tonight," Salt replied. "I'm dead tired. Think I'll hit the hay early."

Only one light burned in the living-room as Penny stomped in out of the cold. Mrs. Weems, the plump housekeeper who had served the Parkers for many years, sat beside the hearth, sewing.

"I'm glad you're home at last!" she exclaimed, getting up quickly. "You've no idea how worried I've been."

"But Louise and I telephoned."

"I couldn't hear you very well. I barely was able to make out that something had happened to your car."

"A major catastrophe, Mrs. Weems. Every tire was stolen!"

While the housekeeper bombarded her with questions, Penny stripped off overshoes and heavy outer clothing. Pools of water began to form on the rug.

"Take everything out to the kitchen," Mrs. Weems said hastily. "Have you had your supper?"

"Not even a nibble. And I'm starving!"

As Mrs. Weems began to prepare a hot meal, Penny

perched herself on the kitchen table, alternately talking, and chewing on a sugared bun.

"If you ever were lost in an Arctic blizzard you have a good picture of what Louise and I endured," she narrated grandly. "Oh, it was awful!"

"Losing five practically new tires is a mere detail in comparison?"

"It's nothing less than a tragedy! I was thinking—maybe you ought to break the sad news to Dad."

"Indeed not. You'll have to tell him yourself. However, he's attending a meeting and won't be home until eleven."

"That's much too late for me," Penny said quickly. "I'll see him in the morning. And I do hope you cooperate by giving him a dandy breakfast."

"Just see to it that you don't oversleep," suggested the housekeeper dryly.

Penny consumed an enormous supper and then slipped off to bed. She did not hear her father come home a few hours later. In the morning when Mrs. Weems called her, it seemed advisable to take a long time in dressing. Her father had gone by the time she strolled downstairs.

"Did you tell Dad?" she asked the housekeeper hopefully.

"You knew I would," chided Mrs. Weems. "Your father expects to see you at his office at nine o'clock."

"How'd he take the blow?"

"Naturally one couldn't expect him to be pleased."

With a deep sigh, Penny sat down to breakfast. Worry over the coming interview did not interfere with her usual excellent appetite. She had orange juice, two slices of toast, four pancakes, and then, somewhat concerned lest she lose her slim figure, debated whether to ask for another helping.

"The batter's all gone," Mrs. Weems settled the matter. "Do stop dawdling and get on to the office. Your father shouldn't be kept waiting."

With anything but enthusiasm, Penny took herself to the plant of the Riverview *Star*. Passing through the busy newsroom where reporters pounded at their typewriters, she entered her father's private office.

"Hello, Dad," she greeted him with forced cheerfulness. "Mrs. Weems said you wanted to see me."

"So you lost five tires last night?" the editor barked. Mr. Parker was a lean, keen-eyed man of early middle age, known throughout the state as a fearless newspaper man. At the moment, Penny decided that "fearful" would prove a more descriptive term.

"Well, Dad, it was this way—" she began meekly.

"Never mind a long-winded explanation," he interrupted, smiling. "It wasn't your fault the car was stripped."

Penny wondered if she had heard correctly.

"Your tires weren't the only ones stolen yesterday,"

Mr. Parker resumed. "A half dozen other thefts were reported. In fact, I've known for several weeks that a professional gang of tire thieves has been operating in Riverview."

"Oh, Dad, you're a peach!" Penny cried, making a dive for him. "I'm going to give you a great big kiss!"

"You are not," Mr. Parker grinned, pushing her away. "Try to remember, this is an office."

Penny resigned herself to a chair. Questioned by her father, she gave a straightforward account of how the car had been stripped at the Yacht Club grounds.

"The tire gang is getting bolder every day!" Mr. Parker exclaimed wrathfully. "But we'll soon put a stop to their little game!"

"How, Dad?"

Mr. Parker hesitated and then said: "I can trust you, can't I, Penny?"

"Of course."

"Then I'll tell you this in confidence. For weeks Jerry Livingston, our star reporter, has been working on the case. He's rounded up a lot of evidence against the outfit."

"Then we have a chance to get those tires back!"

"I'm not thinking about that," Mr. Parker said impatiently. "Jerry's gathered enough evidence to smash the entire gang. It will be as big a story as the *Star* ever published."

"When are you breaking it, Dad?"

"Perhaps tomorrow. Depends on the state prosecutor."

"John Gilmore? What does he have to do with it?"

"This story is loaded with dynamite, Penny. If we spread it over our front page before police have a chance to act, the guilty parties are apt to make a getaway."

"That's so," nodded Penny.

"There's another reason I want to consult the Prosecutor before I use the story," Mr. Parker resumed. "Some of the men involved—"

A tap sounded on the door. Without completing what he had started to say, the editor called, "Come in."

Jerry Livingston entered the office. He was a good-looking young man, alert and clean-cut. Smiling at Penny, he slapped a folded paper on Mr. Parker's desk.

"Here's my story on the tire thefts, Chief," he said. "As far as I'm concerned, this winds up the case."

"You've done fine work, Jerry," Mr. Parker praised. "Thanks to your work, we ought to clean out the gang."

"I hope so, Chief. Guess you have all the proofs needed to back up the story."

"All the evidence is locked in my safe. I have an appointment scheduled with the Prosecutor. If he Okays the story, we'll publish it tomorrow. By the way, Jerry, what are your plans?"

"Well, I have a couple of weeks before I go into the Army Air Corps."

"Then treat yourself to a vacation, starting right now," said Mr. Parker. "Can you use it?"

"Can I?" grinned Jerry. "Know what I'll do? I'll hop the noon train and head for the Canadian wilds on a hunting trip."

Mr. Parker wrote out a check which he presented to the young man.

"We'll be sorry to lose you, Jerry," he said regretfully. "But remember, a job always will be waiting when you return."

The reporter shook hands with Mr. Parker and Penny, then left the office.

"We'll miss Jerry around here," the editor remarked.

Penny nodded. She and Jerry had shared many an adventure together, and he was one of her truest friends. The office would not seem the same without him.

"My appointment with the Prosecutor is at ten-thirty," said Mr. Parker briskly. "I'll gather my papers and be on my way."

The editor placed Jerry's signed story in a leather portfolio. Next he went to the safe and fumbled with the dial.

"Want me to open it for you?" Penny asked, after he had tried several times.

Without waiting for a reply, she stooped down, twisted the dial a few times, and opened the heavy door.

"Young lady, how did you learn the combination?" Mr. Parker demanded in chagrin.

"Oh, the numbers are written on the under side of your desk," Penny grinned. "Not a very good place either! You must trust your office help."

"Fortunately my reporters aren't quite as observing as a certain daughter," Mr. Parker retorted grimly.

The editor removed a fat brown envelope from one of the drawers of the safe. Glancing at the papers it contained, he added them to the contents of the portfolio. He then locked the safe.

"How about letting me see that story?" Penny asked.

Mr. Parker smiled but shook his head. "Only two persons know the facts of the case—Jerry and myself."

"Let's make it a trio."

"It will be after I've talked to the Prosecutor. I've got to step right along, too, or I'll be late."

"But Dad—"

"You'll read the story in tomorrow's *Star*—I hope," her father laughed. Picking up the portfolio, he started for the door. "Just contain your impatience until I get back. And please keep those slippery little fingers away from my safe!"

CHAPTER

5

AN IMPORTANT INTERVIEW

AFTER HER father had gone, Penny remained in the private office. Eager to be off, Mr. Parker had neglected to make any arrangements concerning the stripped car at the Riverview Yacht Club.

"Oh, bother!" she thought impatiently. "Now I must wait here until he comes back to learn what I'm to do. The car should be hauled home."

Penny wrote a letter on the typewriter. As she searched for a stamp, the door swung open. A slightly bald, angular man with hard brown eyes, paused on the threshold. The man was Harley Schirr, an assistant editor, next in authority to Mr. DeWitt. Of the entire *Star* staff, he was the only person Penny actively disliked.

"Oh, good morning, Miss Parker," he said with elaborate courtesy. "Your father isn't here?"

"No, he went away a few minutes ago."

"And you are taking care of the office in his ab-

sence?" Mr. Schirr smiled. Even so, to Penny's sensitive ears, the words had an insolent ring.

"I'm merely waiting for him to return," she answered briefly. "I came to find out what do do about the car."

"Oh, yes, I heard that all of your tires were stolen last night." Mr. Schirr's lips twitched. "Too bad."

"I may get them back again. Dad says—" Penny checked herself, remembering that the information given her by her father was to be kept secret.

"Yes?" encouraged the assistant editor.

"Perhaps police will catch the thieves," she completed.

"I shouldn't count on it if I were you, Miss Parker. Black Markets have flourished in this city for months. Nothing's been done to stop it."

"Just what do you mean by a Black Market, Mr. Schirr?"

"Illegal trading in various scarce commodities. Tires either stolen or hijacked, are sold by the crooks to so-called honest dealers who serve the public. It's now a big-time business."

"What does Dad think about it?"

"Well, now, I really couldn't tell you. Your father doesn't discuss his editorial policy with me. If he did, I'd warn him to lay off all those tire-theft stories."

Penny gazed quickly at the assistant editor, wondering how much he knew of her father's plan.

"Dad usually prints all the news," she said. "Why should he soft-pedal the tire stories?"

"For his health's sake."

"I'm sure I don't know what you mean, Mr. Schirr."

The assistant editor had closed the door behind him. Warming to his subject, he replied: "The men who have muscled into the tire theft racket are ugly lads without scruples. If your father stupidly insists upon trying to smash the outfit, he may not wake up some morning."

The suggestion that her father might ruthlessly be done away with shocked Penny. And a canny corner of her mind demanded to know how Mr. Schirr could be so well informed. She was quite certain her father had not taken him into his confidence.

"Dad is no coward," she said proudly.

"Oh, no one ever questioned his bravery, Miss Parker. Your father is courageous to the point of rashness. But if he prints an exposé story about the tire theft gang, it's apt to prove the most foolish act of his life."

"How do you know he intends to do such a thing?"

The question, sharply put, surprised Mr. Schirr.

"Oh, I don't," he denied hastily. "I merely heard the rumor around the office."

Penny made no reply. As the silence became noticeable, the assistant editor murmured that he would return to see Mr. Parker later and left the office.

Penny glared at the man's retreating back. Even more intensely than before, she disliked Harley Schirr.

"The old sneak cat!" she thought. "I'll bet a cent he's been listening at the door or prying in Dad's papers! I'm sure no rumors have been circulating around the office."

The telephone rang. Automatically Penny took down the receiver.

"Mr. Parker?" inquired a masculine voice.

"He's not here now. This is his daughter speaking. May I take a message?"

"No message," said the purring voice. "Mr. Parker may hear from me later."

"Who is this, please?" asked Penny quickly.

There was no answer, only the click of a receiver being hung on its hook.

The incident, although trifling, annoyed Penny. Getting up from the desk, she walked to the window. Mr. Schirr's intimation had alarmed her, and now the telephone call added to her uneasiness.

"Probably the man who telephoned is well known to Dad," she tried to assure herself. "I'm just imagining that his voice sounded sinister."

Feeling the need of an occupation, Penny wandered out into the editorial room. She chatted with the society editor and for a time watched the world news reports coming in on the noisy teletype machines.

"Need a job?" inquired Editor DeWitt at the slot

of the circular copy desk. "How about writing a few headlines for me?"

"No, thanks," Penny declined. "I'm just waiting for Dad. He should be back any minute now."

It was eleven-forty by the office clock. Never had time seemed to pass so slowly. As Penny debated whether or not to wait any longer, there was a sudden stir in the room. Glancing toward the outside door, she saw that Jerry Livingston, suitcase in hand, had entered.

Immediately reporters and editors left their desks to shake his hand.

"Jerry, you're the best reporter this paper ever had," Mr. DeWitt told him warmly. "We surely hate to see you go."

"Oh, I'll be back," the reporter answered. "You can bet on that!"

Penny crossed the room to say goodbye. Jerry surprisingly tucked her arm through his.

"Come along and see me off on the train," he invited, pulling her along. "Not doing anything special, are you?"

"Just waiting for Dad."

"Then come on," Jerry grinned. "I've got a lot to say to you."

However, once in the taxi, speeding toward the railroad station, the reporter scarcely spoke. He reached out and captured her hand.

"I'm going to miss you, little twirp," he sighed. "No telling when I'll get back to the *Star*. Maybe—"

"Now don't try to work on my sympathies," laughed Penny, though a lump came in her throat. "Oh, Jerry—"

"At your command. Just break down and confess how desolate you'll be without me."

The railroad station was close by and Penny had only a moment to talk.

"Riverview will be a blank without you," she admitted. "But it's that tire-theft story I want to ask you about. Did you ever tell anyone that Dad is planning to expose the gang?"

"Of course not!"

"I knew you wouldn't give out any information," Penny said in relief. "But somehow Harley Schirr has learned about it."

"Schirr! That egg? How could he have found out?"

"I'd like to know myself. He hinted that something dreadful might happen to Dad if the story is printed."

Jerry patted Penny's hand. "Don't give it a thought, kid," he said. "Schirr does a lot of wild talking. Probably whatever he said to you was pure bluff. He doesn't know a thing."

The arrival of the cab at the station put an end to

the conversation. Jerry paid the driver and hustled Penny inside. He barely had time to purchase a ticket before the train was called.

"Well, goodbye," Jerry said, squeezing her hand.

"Have a good time in Canada," Penny replied. "And bring me a nice bear rug!"

"Sure, I'll catch him with my bare hands," Jerry rejoined, making a feeble attempt at a joke.

The train began to move. The reporter swung himself aboard the last Pullman. As he waved from the steps, Penny realized that she had forgotten to ask for his Canadian address.

Soon the train was only a blur down the frosty tracks. Penny climbed a steep ramp to the street. She felt lonesome, and for some reason, discouraged.

"First I lose my car wheels, and now it's Jerry," she reflected sadly. "What a week!"

Penny scarcely knew whether to go home or to the *Star* office. As she debated the matter, her ears were assaulted by the shrill scream of a siren.

"A fire," thought Penny.

An ambulance rushed past. It raced to the end of the short street and pulled up.

"Probably an accident," amended Penny.

Curious to learn what had happened, she began to run. At the end of the street a large crowd had gathered. A car with a smashed fender and damaged

front grillwork, had piled against a street lamp.

"What happened?" Penny asked a man who stood beside her.

"Two cars in a smash-up," he answered. "Didn't see the accident myself."

"But what became of the other automobile?" asked Penny.

She pushed through the gathering crowd to the curb. Broken glass was scattered over the pavement. Ambulance men were searching the wreckage of the car which had struck the lamp post. The other automobile, apparently, had driven away.

Suddenly, Penny's gaze riveted on the rear license plate of the smashed car. In horror she read the number—P–619–10.

"Dad's car!" she whispered. "He's been hurt!"

CHAPTER

6

FRONT PAGE NEWS

NEVER IN her life had Penny been more frightened. Breaking away from the group of people at the curb, she ran to the parked ambulance. A glance into the interior assured her that Mr. Parker had not been placed inside on a stretcher.

"Where is he?" she asked wildly. "Where's my father?"

A white-garbed ambulance attendant turned to stare at her.

"That's my father's car!" Penny cried, pointing to the battered sedan. "Tell me, was he badly hurt?"

The attendant tried to be kind. "We don't know, Miss. Someone put in a call for us. Said we were to pick up an injured man. Evidently he was taken to a hospital before we could get here."

"That's what happened," contributed a small boy who stood close by. "A woman drove by in an auto. She offered to take the man to the hospital and he went with her."

"A tall, lean man in a gray suit?" Penny asked quickly.

"Yes. He had a leather case in his hand."

"Then it was my father!" Penny cried. "How badly was he hurt?"

"Oh, he could walk all right," the boy replied. "He seemed kinda dazed though."

Greatly relieved to learn that her father had escaped serious injury, Penny sought more information. The boy who had witnessed the accident, told her that the car which had caused the smash-up, was a blue sedan.

"Two men were in it," he revealed. "They started to go around your father's car and crowded him toward the curb. Next thing I saw, he'd plowed into the lamp post."

"The other car didn't stop?"

"I'll say it didn't! You should have seen 'em go!"

"Didn't you notice the license number?" Penny asked hopefully.

The boy shook his head.

Having learned all she could from him, Penny questioned other persons. Only one woman in the crowd was able to provide additional information. Her eyewitness account differed slightly from the boy's, but she confirmed that a middle-aged woman in a black coupe had taken the accident victim to a hospital.

"Which hospital?" asked Penny.

The woman could not tell her. She did say, however, that the accident victim seemingly had suffered only minor scratches.

A police car drove up. Penny, frantic to find her father, did not wish to be delayed by questions. Without revealing who she was to members of the investigation squad, she hailed a taxi. Mercy Hospital was only a few blocks away. It seemed reasonable that her father would be taken there for treatment.

A few minutes later, standing anxiously at the information desk of that institution, she learned that Mr. Parker had not been admitted as a patient. The nurse in charge, noting the girl's agitation, kindly offered to telephone other hospitals. After six calls, she reported that she was unable to trace the accident victim.

"Are you sure that your father sought hospital treatment?" she asked Penny.

"Perhaps not. Dad wasn't badly hurt according to witnesses. He may have gone elsewhere."

Thanking the nurse for her help, Penny taxied swiftly home. Mrs. Weems, in an old coat and a turban, was pouring salt on the icy sidewalk in front of the house. From the look on her face it was evident she had not heard the news.

"Mrs. Weems, Dad's been hurt!" Penny cried, leaping from the cab. "In an auto accident!"

"My land!" the housekeeper gasped and allowed the bag of salt to fall from her gloved hand. "How bad is it?"

"I think he was more stunned than anything else. But I've not been able to learn where he was taken. He didn't telephone here?"

"Not unless it was since I've been outdoors."

Picking up the bag of salt, Mrs. Weems followed Penny into the house. Without removing coat or hat, the girl dialed the *Star* office. Editor DeWitt answered.

"Has Dad arrived there?" Penny asked abruptly.

"No, he hasn't returned. Anything wrong?"

Tersely Penny revealed what had occurred. The news shocked the editor for he bore Mr. Parker a genuine affection.

"Now don't you worry," he tried to cheer her. "Your father can't be badly hurt or he never would have walked away from that accident. Just sit tight and our reporters will locate him for you."

During the next hour Penny and Mrs. Weems remained near the telephone. Each moment they waited, their anxiety increased. Mr. DeWitt did not phone. There was no word from the police station. They refused to believe that Mr. Parker had been seriously injured, yet it seemed strange he could not be found.

"It's not like him to allow anyone to worry," declared the housekeeper. "I simply can't understand why he doesn't call to relieve our minds."

Just then the telephone bell jingled. Penny snatched the receiver from its hook.

"DeWitt speaking," said the familiar voice of the editor.

"Any news?" Penny asked quickly. "Did you find Dad?"

"So far we haven't," the editor confessed. "I've personally called the police station, every hospital and private nursing home in Riverview."

"Dad may have gone to a doctor's office for treatment."

"I thought of that," replied DeWitt. "We've checked all the likely ones."

"What could have become of him?" Penny asked desperately. "Mrs. Weems and I are dreadfully worried."

"Oh, he'll show up any minute," comforted Mr. DeWitt. "Probably he doesn't realize anyone is looking for him."

Penny asked the editor if he had learned the identity of the hit-skip driver.

"No one took down the license number of the car," Mr. DeWitt returned regretfully. "Our reporters are still working on the story though."

"The story," murmured Penny faintly. For the first time it occurred to her that her father's accident and subsequent disappearance would be regarded as front page news.

"I don't expect to run an account of the accident until I've talked to your father," DeWitt said hastily. "Now don't worry about anything. I'll let you know the minute I have any news."

Penny hung up the receiver and reported the conversation to Mrs. Weems. A clock on the mantel chimed one-thirty, reminding the housekeeper that lunch had not been prepared.

"No food for me," pleaded Penny. "I don't feel like eating."

"I've rather lost my own appetite," confessed the housekeeper. "However, it's foolish of us to worry. Your father must be safe. No doubt he had an appointment."

Penny's face brightened. "Why, of course!" she exclaimed. "Don't know why I've been so dumb! Dad may still be in conference with Prosecutor Gilmore! I'll call there."

Darting to the telephone, she waited patiently until she was connected with the State prosecutor's office. The lawyer himself talked to her.

"Why, no, Mr. Parker hasn't been here," he replied to her eager inquiry. "I expected him at ten-thirty. Then he telephoned that he had been de-

layed and would see me at eleven-thirty. He failed to keep that appointment also."

The information sent Penny's hopes glimmering. She explained about the accident and listened to the Prosecutor's expression of sympathy. Replacing the receiver, she turned once more to Mrs. Weems.

"I'm more worried than ever now," she quavered. "Dad didn't keep his appointment with Prosecutor Gilmore, and it was a vitally important one."

"We'll hear from him soon—"

"Perhaps we won't." Penny took a quick turn across the room.

"Why, such a thing to say! What do you mean, Penny?"

"Dad has enemies. Harley Schirr told me today that if any attempt was made to expose a certain gang of thieves, it would mean real trouble."

"But your father has had no connection with such persons."

"He and Jerry worked on a case together," Penny explained. "Today at the time of the accident, Dad carried a brief case with all the evidence in it!"

"Even so, I fail to see—"

"According to the report, Dad's car was practically forced off the road," Penny added excitedly. "I think that auto crash was deliberately engineered! Don't you understand, Mrs. Weems? He's fallen into the clutches of his enemies!"

"Now, Penny," soothed the housekeeper. "I'm sure we're making far too much of the accident. We'll soon hear from your father."

"You're saying that to comfort me, Mrs. Weems. Something dreadful has happened! I can *feel* it."

Penny ceased pacing the floor and went to the hall closet for her hat and coat.

"Where are you going?" asked the housekeeper, her eyes troubled.

"To the newspaper office. If word comes, I want to be there to get it the very first minute."

Mrs. Weems started to protest, then changed her mind. She merely said: "Telephone me the moment you have any news."

A brisk walk to the *Star* office did much to restore Penny's sagging courage. As she entered the newsroom, brushing snow from her coat, she saw a group of reporters gathered about Mr. DeWitt's desk.

"News of Dad!" she thought, her pulse pounding.

Glimpsing Penny, the men at the desk began to scatter. They gazed at her in such a kind, sympathetic manner that she became frightened again.

"What is it, Mr. DeWitt?" she asked the editor. "Has Dad been found?"

He shook his head.

"But you must have had some news," she insisted, her gaze on a folded paper which he held. "Please don't hide anything from me."

"Very well," DeWitt responded quietly. "We found this letter in your father's waste-basket."

Penny took the paper. Silently she read the message which had been typed in capital letters.

"MR. PARKER," it warned, "THIS IS TO ADVISE YOU TO LAY OFF ON TIRE THEFT STORIES IN YOUR PAPER. UNLESS YOU CHANGE YOUR POLICY YOU MAY WAKE UP IN A DITCH."

CHAPTER

7

QUESTIONS WITHOUT ANSWERS

"I'D RATHER not have shown that note to you," Mr. DeWitt said quietly. "We found it only a moment ago."

"How did it get in Dad's waste-basket?" Penny asked. "Do you suppose he threw it there himself?"

"That's my guess. Your father never paid any attention to unsigned letters."

Penny reread the threatening note, trying not to show how much it disturbed her. "I wonder if this came by mail?" she remarked.

"We don't know," DeWitt replied. "There was no envelope in the basket."

"Dad never mentioned such a note to me," Penny resumed, frowning. "Probably thought I'd worry about it. This makes the situation look bad, doesn't it, Mr. DeWitt?"

The editor weighed his words carefully before he spoke. "It doesn't prove that your father was waylaid

by enemies, Penny. Not at all. According to reports, Mr. Parker was involved in an ordinary automobile accident, and left the scene of his own free will."

"With a woman who drove a black car."

"Yes, according to eye-witnesses she offered to take him to a hospital for treatment."

"What became of that woman?" demanded Penny. "Can't the police find her?"

"Not so far."

Before Penny could say more, Harley Schirr came to the desk, spreading a dummy sheet for the editor to inspect.

"Here's the front-page layout," he explained. "For the banner we'll give 'em, 'Anthony Parker Mysteriously Disappears,' and beneath it, a double column story. I dug a good picture out of the morgue—the one with Parker dedicating the Riverview Orphans' Home."

DeWitt frowned as he studied the layout. "Parker wouldn't like this, Schirr. It's too sensational. Bust that banner and cut the story down to the bare facts."

"But this is a big story—"

"I'm expecting Mr. Parker to walk in here any minute," retorted DeWitt. "A 'disappearance' spread would make the *Star* look silly."

"Mr. Parker's not going to show up!" Schirr refuted, his eyes blazing. "I say we should play the story for all it's worth."

"I'm sure Dad would hate sensationalism," Penny said, siding with Mr. DeWitt.

The assistant editor turned to glare at her. Although he made no reply, she read anger and dislike in his flashing eyes.

"Cut the story down," DeWitt ordered curtly. "And try to find a more suitable picture of Mr. Parker."

Schirr swept the dummy sheet from the desk, crumpling it in his hand. As he started for the morgue where pictures were filed, he muttered to himself.

"Don't know what's got into that fellow lately," DeWitt sighed.

The editor sat down rather heavily and Penny noticed that he looked tired and pale. For fifteen years he had been closely associated with Mr. Parker, regarding his chief with deep affection.

"Do you feel well, Mr. DeWitt?" she inquired.

"Not so hot," he admitted, reaching for a pencil. "Lately I've been having a little pain in my side—it's nothing though. Just getting old, that's all."

"Why not take the day off, Mr. DeWitt? You've been working too hard."

"Now wouldn't this be a fine time to go home?" the editor barked. "Hard work agrees with me."

Reminded that she was keeping Mr. DeWitt from his duties, Penny soon left the *Star* office. Debating a

moment, she walked to the nearby police station. There she was courteously received by Chief Jalman, a personal friend of her father's.

"We'll find Mr. Parker," he assured her confidently. "His description has been broadcast over the radio. We've instructed all our men to be on the watch for him."

Penny broached the possibility that her father had been waylaid by enemies.

"Facts fail to support such a theory," replied Chief Jalman. "It's my opinion your father will show up any hour, wondering what the fuss is all about."

Penny left the police station rather cheered. Almost without thinking, she chose a route which led toward the scene of the accident. Reaching the familiar street, she noted that her father's battered car had been towed away. All broken glass had been swept from the pavement.

"When I was here before I should have questioned more people," she thought. "It never occurred to me then that Dad would fail to show up."

Noticing a candy store which fronted the street close to the bent lamp post, Penny went inside. A friendly looking woman with gray hair came to serve her.

"I'm not a customer," Penny explained. She added that her father had been injured in the car accident, and that she was seeking information.

"I've already been questioned by police detectives," replied the owner of the candy shop. "I'm afraid I can't tell you very much."

"Did you witness the accident?"

"Oh, yes, I saw it, but it happened so fast I wasn't sure whose fault it was."

"You didn't take down the license number of the blue hit-skip car?"

"Was it blue?" the woman inquired. "Now I told the police, maroon."

"My information came from a small boy, so he may have been mistaken. Did you notice the woman who offered my father a ride?"

"Oh, yes, she was about my age—around forty."

"Well dressed?"

"Rather plainly, I would say. But she drove a fine, late-model car."

"Would you consider her a woman of means?"

"Judging from the car—yes."

Penny asked many more questions, trying to gain an accurate picture of the woman who had aided her father. She was somewhat reassured when the candy shop owner insisted that Mr. Parker had entered the car of his own free will.

"Did he seem dazed by the accident?" she asked thoughtfully.

"Well, yes, he did. I saw your father get into the

car sort of holding his head. Then he asked the woman to stop at the curb."

"Why was that?"

"He'd forgotten something—a leather carrying case. At any rate, he returned to his own auto for it. Then he drove away with the woman."

As puzzled as ever, Penny went out on the street once more. The weather had turned colder, but she scarcely felt the icy blast which whipped her face.

It was silly to worry, she told herself sternly. Why, all the facts supported Police Chief Jalman's belief that her father soon would return home. Mrs. Weems was confident he would be found safe—so was Mr. DeWitt. After all, only five hours had elapsed since the accident. A disappearance couldn't be considered serious in such a short period.

But try as she might, Penny could not free her mind of grave misgivings. She could not forget the mysterious telephone call, the threatening letter, and Harley Schirr's cocksure opinion that her father would not be found.

She stood disconsolate, gazing into the whirling snow storm. At the end of the street the railroad station loomed as a dark blur, reminding her of Jerry. If only he hadn't gone away! Jerry was the one person who might help her, and she knew of no way to reach him.

CHAPTER

8

A FEW CHANGES

NEXT MORNING, Penny, red-eyed because she had slept little, walked slowly toward the *Star* office. Throughout the long night there had been no word from Mr. Parker.

At every street corner newsboys shouted the latest headlines—that the publisher had been missing nearly twenty-four hours. Even the *Star* carried a black, ugly banner across its front page.

Penny bought a copy, reading with displeasure the story of Mr. Parker's disappearance.

"I can't understand why Mr. DeWitt let this go through," she thought. "If Dad were here, he'd certainly hate it."

Entering the lobby of the *Star* building, Penny pressed the elevator button. A long time elapsed before the cage descended. To her surprise she saw that it was operated, not by Mose Johnson, the colored man, but by the janitor.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Miss Penny," the man

apologized. "I'm not much good at operating this contraption."

"Where is Mose this morning, Charley?"

"Fired."

Penny could not hide her amazement. The old colored man had been employed ten years at the *Star* plant. Although not strictly efficient, Mose's habits were good, and Mr. Parker had taken an affectionate interest in him.

"It's a shame, if you ask me," the janitor added.

"What happened, Charley? Who discharged him?"

"That guy Schirr."

"Harley Schirr? But he has no authority."

"An editor can fire and hire. I think he was just tryin' out his stuff on poor old Mose."

"During my father's absence, Mr. DeWitt is in full charge here," Penny said emphatically.

"DeWitt *was* in charge. But they hauled him off to the hospital last night with a bad pain in his tummy. Seems he had an appendicitis attack. The doctor rushed him off and didn't even wait until morning to operate."

The news stunned Penny. She murmured that she hoped Mr. DeWitt was doing well.

"Reckon he is," agreed the janitor. "We all chipped in and sent him some flowers—roses. Mose gave fifty cents, too."

Penny's mind came back to the problem of the colored man.

"So Mr. Schirr discharged him," she commented. "I wonder why?"

The janitor pressed a button and the cage moved slowly upward.

"Mose was due on at midnight," he explained. "He didn't get here until after two o'clock."

"Didn't he have a reason for being so late?"

The cage stopped with a jerk. "Sure, Mose had a pip this time! Something about being detained by a ghost! Schirr didn't go for it at all. Swelled up like a poisoned pup and fired Mose on the spot."

"I'm sorry," Penny replied. "Dad liked Mose a lot."

"Any news from your father?"

Penny shook her head. As far as possible she was determined to keep her troubles to herself. Turning to leave the cage, she inquired:

"Where is Mose now? At home?"

"He's down in the boiler room, sittin' by the furnace. Says he's afraid to go home for fear his old lady will give him the works."

"Will you please ask Mose to wait there for me?" Penny requested. "I want to talk to him before he leaves the building."

"I'll be glad to tell him," the janitor said. Hesitating, he added: "If you've got any influence with Schirr, you might speak a good word for me."

"Why for you?" smiled Penny. "Surely your job is safe."

"I don't know about that," the janitor responded gloomily. "This morning when Schirr was comin' up in the elevator he said to me: 'Charley, there's going to be a few changes made around here. I'm going to cut out all the old, useless timber.' He looked at me kinda funny-like too. You know, I passed my sixty-eighth birthday last August."

"Now don't start worrying, Charley," Penny cheered him. "We couldn't run this building without you."

Deeply troubled, she tramped down the hall to the newsroom. Reporters were in a fever of activity, pounding out their stories. Copy boys had a nervous, tense expression as they ran to and fro on their errands. Harley Schirr, however, was not in evidence.

"The Big Shot has sealed himself in your father's office!" informed one of the copy desk men in a muted voice. "Guess you heard about DeWitt?"

Penny nodded.

"The Great Genius has taken over, and how! This place is operating on an efficiency-plus basis now. Why, he's got me so cockeyed, I compose poetry."

Penny crossed to her father's office, tapping on the frosted glass door.

"Who is it?" demanded Schirr, his voice loud and unpleasant.

Penny spoke her name. In a moment the door opened, and the editor bowed and smiled. As if she were a guest of honor, he motioned her to a seat.

"We're doing everything we can to trace your father," he said. "So far, we've had no luck and the police admit they are baffled. I can't express to you how sorry I am."

To Penny's ears the words were words only, lacking sincerity. Determining to waste no time, she spoke of DeWitt's sudden illness.

"Oh yes, he'll be off duty for at least a month," replied Mr. Schirr. "Naturally in his absence I have assumed charge. We put out a real paper this morning."

"I saw the front page."

Penny longed to say that the story about her father had displeased her. However, she knew it would do no good. The account, once printed, could not be recalled. Far better, she reasoned, to let the matter pass.

"I hear Mose Johnson has been discharged," she remarked.

"Yes, we had to let him go." Mr. Schirr opened a desk drawer, helping himself to one of Mr. Parker's cigars. "Mose is indolent, irresponsible—a drag on the payroll."

"My father always liked him."

"Yes, he did seem to favor the old coot," agreed Schirr with a shrug. "Well, thank you for dropping in, Miss Parker. If we have any encouraging news, I'll see that you are notified at once."

Well aware that she had been dismissed, Penny left the office. Schirr's attitude angered her. He had made her feel unwelcome in her own father's newspaper plant.

As she closed the door behind her, she realized that nearly every eye in the apparently-busy newsroom, had focused upon her. Deliberately, she composed herself. Acting undisturbed, she swept past the rows of desks to a rear stairway leading to the basement.

The janitor had delivered her message to Mose Johnson. She found the old colored man curled up fast asleep on a crate by the warm stove.

Penny touched Mose on the arm. He straightened up as suddenly as if someone had set off a fire-cracker.

"Oh, Miss Penny!" he beamed. "I'se suah su'prised at seein' you down heah in dis dumpy fu'nace room. But I thanks you just the same fo' wakin' me up out o' dat ghost dream."

"Were you having a ghost dream?" echoed Penny.

"Yes, Miss. Yo' see I was dreamin' about dat same ghost I saw last night on de way to work."

Penny, fully aware that Mose was directing the conversation where he wished it to go, hid a smile.

"I heard about that, Mose," she commented. "It must have been quite a lively ghost to make you two hours late."

"It suah was a lively ghost," Mose confirmed, bobbing his woolly head. "Why, it walked around jest like a live pu'son."

"Aren't you being a bit superstitious, Mose?"

"Deedy not, Miss. You is supe'stitious when you sees a ghost dat ain't dar. But when you sees one dat is dar you ain't supe'stitious. You is jest plain scared!"

"Suppose you tell me about it," Penny invited.

"Well, Miss Penny, it was like dis," began the old colored man. "At half past eleven I starts off fo' work same as always. I picks up mah lunch box de ole lady packed fo' me, an' scoots off toward de bus stop to get de 11:45. But I nevah get dar. When I was goin' down dat road runnin' past de old Harrison place, I seen de ghost."

"The Harrison place?" interrupted Penny. "Where is that?"

"You know de road that winds up Craig Hill? It's out towa'd de boat club."

"You don't mean that big estate house with the fence surrounding it?"

"Dat's de place! Well, I seed dis heah ghost a cavortin' around behind de big iron gate dat goes in to de old Harrison place. De ghost nevah sees me, but

I gets a good close-up of him. He was dressed in white and he was carryin' his own tombstone around in his arms jes' like it doan weigh nothin'."

"Oh, Mose!" protested Penny. "And then what happened? Did the ghost disappear?"

"No, Miss," grinned the colored man, "but I did! I turns tail an' runs as fast as a man half mah age could go, an' I nevah stops fo' nuthin' till I gits back to mah own place.

"When I tells mah ole lady what was goin' on she says, 'Mose, you sees white ghosts 'cause you been a drinkin' some mo' o' dat white-eye. It's twelve o'clock dis minute and you'se missed de last bus. Now you start walkin'! And if you is fired, don't nevah da'ken dat do' no mo'.' "

Old Mose drew a deep sigh. "And dat's jest what happened, Miss Penny. I ain't got no job an' no mo' home than a rabbit. I'se suah bubblin' oveh with trouble. It all come from seein' dat ghost you says I didn't see."

"I'm sure you thought you saw one," replied Penny. "If you'll promise to attend strictly to your duties hereafter, I'll ask Mr. Schirr to reinstate you on the payroll."

Old Mose brightened. "I suah nuff will!" he said jubilantly. "I won't have no mo' truck with dat ghost. No sir!"

To face Mr. Schirr once more, was a most unpleasant ordeal for Penny. Nevertheless, she sought his office, apologizing for the intrusion.

"I *am* busy," the editor said pointedly. "What is it you want?"

Penny explained that she had talked with Mose Johnson and was convinced that his offense would not be repeated.

"I want you to put him back on his old job," she requested.

"Impossible!"

"Why do you take that attitude?" inquired Penny, stiffening for an argument. "Dad always liked Mose."

"One can't mix sentiment with business. I have a job to do here and I intend to do it efficiently."

"Dad probably will show up before another day."

"I don't like to dash your hopes," said Mr. Schirr. "We've tried to spare your feelings. Perhaps your father will be found, but you know I tried to warn him he was inviting trouble when he mixed with the tire-theft gang."

"So you believe Dad has fallen into the clutches of those men?"

"I do."

"What makes you think so? Have you any evidence?"

"Not a scrap."

"And how did you learn Dad intended to expose the higher-ups?"

"I don't mind telling you I heard him talking to Jerry Livingston about it."

"Oh, I see."

"We're getting nowhere with this discussion," Mr. Schirr said impatiently. "I really am busy—"

"Will you reinstate Mose?" Penny asked, reverting to the original subject.

"I've already given my answer."

"After all, this is my father's paper," Penny said, trying to control her voice. "It's not a corporation. Only Dad's money is invested here."

"So what?"

"As a personal favor I ask you to reinstate Mose."

"You're making an issue of it?"

"Call it that if you like."

Mr. Schirr's dark eyes blazed. He slammed a paper weight across the desk and it dropped to the floor with a hard thud.

"Very well," he said stiffly, "we'll restore your pet to the payroll."

"Thank you, Mr. Schirr."

"But get this, Miss Parker," the editor completed. "We may as well have an understanding. While your father is absent, I'm in full charge here. In the future I'll have no interference from you or any other person."

CHAPTER

9

AN OPEN SAFE

RATHER FLATTENED by the interview with Mr. Schirr, Penny was glad to leave the *Star* plant. Going down in the elevator, she requested Charley to tell Mose Johnson that he had been restored to his old job.

"That's fine!" the janitor beamed. "Mighty glad to hear it." Opening the cage door, he inquired: "Will you be going to see Mr. DeWitt?"

"I thought I would."

"He's at City Hospital. You might tell him that we all miss him around here."

"I'll certainly deliver the message," promised Penny.

City Hospital was only six blocks away. Penny bought flowers and then presented herself at the institution. After a brief wait in the lobby, she was allowed to see Mr. DeWitt for a few minutes.

"Good morning," she said cheerfully, handing the box of flowers to a nurse.

Mr. DeWitt, pale and weak, stirred and turned his head so that he could see her.

"What's good about it?" he muttered with a trace of his old spirit. "They won't even let me sit up!"

"I should think not," smiled Penny. She sat down in a chair beside the bed.

"Of all times to get laid up!" the editor went on. "Heard from your father?"

Penny shook her head. A long silence followed, and then she said brightly:

"But he'll be found—probably today."

Mr. DeWitt lay with his eyes closed. "I've been thinking—" he mumbled drowsily.

"Yes?" Penny waited.

"Mind's still fogged with that blamed ether," DeWitt muttered. "About your father—" His voice trailed off.

"Do you think he could have been waylaid by enemies?" Penny asked after a moment. "Mr. Schirr believes his disappearance has a connection with the tire-theft gang."

Mr. DeWitt's eyes opened again. "I don't know," he mumbled. "Your father was planning to break a big story—didn't tell me much about it."

"You don't know what evidence he carried in the portfolio when he went to see the State Prosecutor?"

DeWitt shook his head. "Jerry'll know."

"But how can I reach him?"

"Didn't he leave an address at the office?"

"I don't think so."

"Then there's no way to reach him." Exhausted from so much talking, DeWitt fell silent. At length however, he aroused himself and asked: "Have you tried your father's safe?"

"For Jerry's address?"

"No, the names of the tire-theft gang. If the police had something to work on—"

"Dad took a lot of papers out just before he started for the Prosecutor's office," Penny replied thoughtfully. "But some of the evidence may have been left. It's worth investigating."

The nurse returned to the room with a vase for the flowers.

"I'm afraid I can't allow you to remain much longer," she said regretfully.

As she arose to go, Penny remembered to deliver Old Charley's message.

"How's everything at the office?" Mr. DeWitt asked. "Who's in charge?"

"Harley Schirr."

Mr. DeWitt's forehead wrinkled. "Now I know I've got to roll out of here!" he declared. "Things will be in a nice state by the time I get back."

Penny did not wish to worry him. "Oh, everything will go along," she soothed. "Mr. Schirr is very efficient in his methods."

"And opinionated," muttered DeWitt. "Oh, well, I'll be back on the job in ten days."

Penny did not disillusion him. Saying goodbye, she returned to the newspaper office. Pausing at the downstairs advertising department, she talked to Bud Corbin, a close friend of Jerry's.

"This is the only address Jerry gave me," Mr. Corbin said, taking a card from his billfold. "A wire might reach him. But there's a good chance it won't. When he left here, he wasn't sure he'd stop at Elk Horn Lodge."

Grateful for the address, Penny composed a telegram which the advertising man offered to send for her. In the message she not only told of her father's strange disappearance, but asked for a complete duplication of material lost in the portfolio.

"At least I've started the ball rolling," she thought, with renewed hope in her efforts. "I believe Jerry can help if only he gets the wire."

Penny had not forgotten Mr. DeWitt's suggestion that some evidence against the tire-theft gang might be found in Mr. Parker's safe.

"I hate to open it while Dad is away," she reflected. "Still, I know the combination, and I'm sure he would want me to do it."

To brave Harley Schirr a second time was a duty not to Penny's liking. She debated waiting until after four o'clock when the editor doubtless would

leave the building. But time was precious and she could not afford to wait.

"What am I, a coward?" she prodded herself. "Why should I be afraid of Harley Schirr? When Dad gets back on the job, he'll bounce him back where he belongs."

Penny's reappearance in the newsroom created a slight stir. However, no one spoke to her as she walked straight to her father's office. The door was closed.

"Mr. Schirr isn't in conference?" she asked one of the copy readers.

"No, just go right on in," the man returned carelessly.

Without knocking, Penny opened the door. On the threshold, she paused, startled. Harley Schirr was down on his knees in front of the open safe. Evidently he had been going through Mr. Parker's private papers in systematic fashion for he was circled by little piles of manila envelopes.

Mr. Schirr was even more startled than Penny. He sprang to his feet, the picture of guilt. Then, recovering his poise, he scowled and demanded: "Here again?"

Penny carefully closed the office door before she spoke. Then her words were terse.

"Mr. Schirr, kindly explain what you are doing in my father's safe."

"Looking for information about the tire-theft gang."

"A story you say the *Star* never should print."

"That's neither here nor there." A deep flush had crept over Schirr's cheeks but his manner remained confident. "As editor I have to know what's going on."

"Who gave you permission to open the safe?"

"You forget that I am editor here, Miss Parker."

"At least I've been reminded of it enough times," Penny retorted. "How did you learn the combination?"

"I've known it."

"You saw the numbers written on Dad's desk," Penny accused.

Mr. Schirr did not deny the charge. Turning his back, he started to remove a rubber band from a small stack of yellowed letters. The act infuriated Penny, for she recognized the packet. Years before, the letters had been written by her own mother, and Mr. Parker always had treasured them.

"Don't you touch those!" she cried, darting forward. "They're personal."

Snatching the packet from Mr. Schirr, she gathered up the other papers and envelopes from the floor. Thrusting everything into the safe, she closed and locked the door.

"Well!" commented the editor scathingly.

"You're through here!" said Penny, facing him with blazing eyes. "Do you understand? I'm discharging you."

Mr. Schirr looked stunned. Then he laughed unpleasantly.

"So *you're* discharging me," he mocked. "By what right may I ask?"

"This is my father's plant."

"Which doesn't necessarily make you the editor or the owner, Miss Penelope Parker. You're a minor as well as a nuisance. If your father proves to be dead, the court will step in—"

"Get out!" cried Penny, fighting to keep back the tears. "You don't care about Dad, or anything but your own selfish interests!"

"Now you're hysterical."

Penny's anger subsided, to be replaced by a cool determination that Harley Schirr should not remain in charge of the *Star* another hour.

"I meant just what I said," she told him quietly. "Please go."

Schirr smiled grimly. Seating himself at the desk, his eyes challenged hers.

"I remain as editor here," he announced. "If you wish to contest my right, take your case to court. In the meantime, keep out of my private office."

CHAPTER

10

TALE OF A GHOST

BEATEN AND close to tears, Penny stumbled out of Harley Schirr's office. As she paused just beyond the closed door, every eye in the newsroom focused upon her. Salt Sommers, camera box slung over his shoulder, went over and spoke to her.

"Penny, we all heard that row. If you say the word, we'll walk out of here in a body."

Penny smiled, touched by the expression of loyalty. "That would do no good," she replied. "Thanks just the same."

"We're through taking orders from Schirr!" Salt went on. "He always has been a pain in the neck, and now that he has authority, there's no holding him down. How about it, boys?"

A chorus of approval greeted his words. One of the reporters picked up a paper weight and would have hurled it against the closed door, had not another restrained him.

"I'm sure Dad would want everyone to carry on," Penny said quietly. "The paper must be published the same as always."

"We could do our work and do it well, if Schirr would just leave us alone," growled one of the copy readers.

"That's right!" added another. "Why don't you take over, Penny?"

"Mr. Schirr just reminded me that I'm not the editor. I know nothing about running a newspaper."

"How about the time you ran the High School weekly?" Salt reminded her. "Why, you did a bang up job of it, and uncovered *The Secret Pact* story to boot! Don't try to tell us you don't know how to run a newspaper!"

"A weekly high school sheet and the *Star* are two different propositions."

"But your father has a fine organization here," Salt argued. "If Schirr can be kept from breaking it up, everything will go along. The boys all know their jobs."

Penny's eyes began to sparkle. But she said: "I don't see how I could take over, much as I would like to do it. Schirr has staked out rights in Dad's office and nothing will move him short of a court order."

"You don't need a fancy office to run a paper," Salt grinned. "We'll just take our orders from you. Schirr can sit until he's had enough of it."

Penny gazed at the eager, loyal faces about her. Nearly all of the men were old employes, personally trained by her father and Mr. DeWitt. She knew she could depend on them.

"We'll do it!" she exclaimed suddenly. "As your new editor, I wish to issue my first order. Please, let's not publish any more sensational stories about Dad's disappearance."

"Okay Chief," grinned one of the desk men. "That suits us all fine."

Penny was given a seat of honor at the slot of the circular copy desk. There she was able to read and pass upon every story which flowed from the typewriters of the various reporters. With the courteous help of one of the deskmen, she remade the front page of the noon edition. A particularly sensational story about Mr. Parker, prepared earlier in the day, was promptly "busted."

Penny found her new duties exacting, but surprisingly easy. Over the years it was astonishing how much she had learned about the workings of a newspaper plant. At different times she had served as reporter, society editor and special feature writer. As for the editorial policy of the *Star*, she was thoroughly familiar with it, for her father frequently aired his views at home.

Shortly after the noon edition rolled from the press, the buzzer in Mr. Schirr's office sounded. Mr. Park-

er's private secretary did not answer. The buzzer kept on for nearly five minutes. Then the door was flung open.

"What the blazes is the matter with everyone?" Schirr shouted.

His gaze fastened upon Penny at the copy desk.

"Meet our new editor, Mr. Schirr," said Salt, who had that moment come out of the camera room.

Schirr ignored Penny. Snatching up one of the noon editions, still fresh with wet ink, he glanced at the front page. His eyes flashed.

"Eckert," he said to the head copy man, "come into my office. I want to talk to you."

"Oh, sure," said Eckert, but he did not follow Schirr into the adjoining room.

Soon the ex-editor came storming out to learn what was wrong. This time his expression was baffled.

"Mr. Eckert," he said with exaggerated politeness. "Will you please step into my office?"

"Sorry," replied the copy reader. "You may as well know right now that you're not giving the orders around here!"

"We'll see about that!" cried Schirr.

Darting to one of the speaking tubes, he called the foreman of the press room.

"Schirr talking!" he said curtly. "Stop the presses! Kill that noon edition! We're making over the front page!"

"Can't hear you," was the reply, for word had been passed to the men in the pressroom. "Louder!"

Schirr shouted until he was nearly hoarse. Then suddenly conscious that he was making a spectacle of himself, he slammed into his office. A minute later he reappeared, hat jammed low over his eyes.

"This is a very clever scheme, Miss Parker," he said, facing her. "Well, it won't work. I'm leaving, but I'll be back. With a lawyer!"

He strode from the newsroom, banging the door so hard the glass rattled.

"Don't worry about that egg," Salt advised Penny. "He's mostly bluff."

"I think he does mean to get a court order," she returned soberly.

"He may try," Salt shrugged. "We can handle him."

Following Schirr's departure, everything moved smoothly at the *Star* plant. One edition after another rolled from the presses. Penny was kept busy, and frequently she was worried and in doubt. Nevertheless, everyone made the way easy for her, and as the day wore on she gained confidence.

Throughout the afternoon, news stories kept pouring into the *Star* office, but no encouraging information came in regard to Mr. Parker. Several times Penny called the police station and also talked with Mrs. Weems. The housekeeper, fearful that the girl

would become ill, insisted upon bringing a hot evening meal to the office.

"Penny, you've been here all day," she chided anxiously. "You must come home with me."

"I can't just yet," Penny replied. "There's too much to do. By tomorrow, if Schirr doesn't make trouble, things will smooth out."

"You're working so hard you'll be sick abed!"

"I want to work," Penny said grimly. "It keeps me from thinking. Anyway, Dad would want me to do it."

Mrs. Weems sighed as she gathered up the lunch basket and thermos bottle. Penny barely had tasted the food.

"When will you be home?" the housekeeper asked.

"I can't say exactly. After the night editions are out. Don't sit up for me."

"You know I couldn't go to bed until you are home," Mrs. Weems responded. "You'll take a taxi?"

"Of course," promised Penny.

After the housekeeper had gone, she plunged into her duties once more. With the force short of two men, DeWitt and Schirr, there really was too much work for the desk men to do unassisted. Penny wrote headlines, copy-read stories, and passed on all matters of policy. So busy did she keep, that when at length she glanced at her watch, it was eleven-thirty.

"Gracious!" she thought. "And Mrs. Weems will be waiting up for me!"

Saying goodnight to the men who would carry on in her absence, she went down the back stairs to the street. As she glanced about for a taxicab, she saw Old Mose Johnson shuffling toward the loading dock.

"Good evening," she greeted him. "I'm glad to see you're ahead of time tonight."

"Good evenin', Miss Penny," the colored man said, doffing his tattered hat. "Yas'm. I'se heah, but I seed dat same ghost a-lurkin' behind de gate!"

"I hope that ghost isn't becoming a habit with you, Mose."

"Deed Miss Penny, he's mo' dan a habit," the colored man sighed. "He's a suah-nuff live ghost. De fust time I seed him I thought he wasn't no imagination ghost. But when I saw him agin' tonight I was dead suah of it."

"What happened this time, Mose?"

"Well, Miss Penny, I was a walking along dat same road, down by de ole Harrison place when I seed him again. He was a-cavortin' behind dat same iron gate. And he was dressed de same too, in a long white robe."

"And you ran the same too, I suppose?" smiled Penny.

"Ah made myself scarce around dat gate, but I didn't run home dis time. I was a-skeered of mah ole

woman. I beats it to de restaurant on de co'ner and waits dere 'till a bus comes. Oh, I'se gettin' good, Miss Penny! I can see a ghost and git to work on time, all de same evenin'!"

"Well, keep up the good work," Penny said jokingly as she turned away.

The meeting with Old Mose had served to divert the girl's mind from her own difficulties. Riding home by taxi, she caught herself reviewing the details of the colored man's outlandish tale.

"Mose couldn't have seen a ghost," she thought, "but he's honest about being frightened. If I didn't have so many serious troubles, I'd be tempted to investigate the old Harrison estate myself."

Penny alighted at her home and walked wearily up the shoveled path. Snow was falling once more. Already the exposed porch was covered with a half-inch coating of feathery flakes.

Inside the house a light flashed on. The bright beam shining through the window drew Penny's attention to a series of freshly-made footprints criss-crossing the porch.

"Mrs. Weems must have had a visitor," she thought, observing that the heel marks were made by a woman's shoe.

As Penny reached for the door knob, her glance fell upon a long, narrow envelope which protruded

from the tin mailbox. She removed it, wondering why the housekeeper had neglected to do so.

Mrs. Weems opened the door.

"Thank goodness, you're home at last, Penny. I fell asleep on the davenport. There isn't any word—"

"Not a scrap of news," Penny completed.

Dropping the letter on the center table, she removed her wraps and flung herself full length on the davenport.

"You poor child!" Mrs. Weems murmured. "You're practically exhausted. Please go straight to bed. I'll fix some warm milk and perhaps you can sleep."

"I don't feel as if I'd ever sleep again," Penny declared. "I'm tired, but I feel so excited and tense."

Mrs. Weems picked up the girl's coat and cap. Shaking them free of snow, she hung the garments in the closet.

"Did you have a bad time of it today?" Penny asked after a moment.

"It wasn't exactly pleasant," Mrs. Weems replied. "Reporters and photographers came from every paper in Riverview. The police too—although I was glad to have them. And the telephone! I counted twelve calls in an hour."

"You must be dead. You shouldn't have waited up for me."

"I wanted to, Penny. About an hour ago I thought I heard your step on the porch, but I was mistaken."

Penny sat up. "Haven't you had a caller during the last hour, Mrs. Weems?"

"No, I've been alone."

"But I saw footprints on the porch! And I found this in the mailbox!"

Penny snatched the long envelope from the table. Holding it beneath the bridge lamp, she noticed for the first time that it bore no stamp. Strangely, it was addressed to her.

"Why, where did you get that letter?" cried Mrs. Weems.

"Found it in the mailbox." Penny's hand trembled as she ripped open the flap.

A sheet of writing paper, high quality and slightly perfumed, slid from the envelope. The message was terse and bore no signature at the end. It read:

"Offer a suitable reward and information will be provided as to the whereabouts of your father. Make your offer known in the *Star*."

CHAPTER

11

BY A CEMETERY WALL

PENNY AND Mrs. Weems reread the anonymous message many times, analyzing every word.

"Plainly this note was written by a woman of some means for the paper is fine quality," Penny commented. "She must have sneaked up on the porch about an hour ago."

"Call the police at once," urged Mrs. Weems. "They'll tell us what we should do."

"Whoever left the note may be watching the house."

"We must risk that, Penny. I'll call the station myself."

While Mrs. Weems busied herself at the telephone, Penny switched off the living-room light. She could see no one loitering anywhere near the house. Slipping on her coat, she went outside to inspect the footprints left on the porch. Only a few remained uncovered by snow. There was no way to tell in which

direction the writer of the anonymous message had gone.

Mrs. Weems had completed her telephone call by the time Penny reentered the house.

"Two detectives will be here in a few minutes," she revealed. "You keep watch for them while I run upstairs and get into something more suitable than a lounging robe."

Within ten minutes a car drew up in front of the house. Penny already was acquainted with Detectives Dick Brandon and George Fuller, and had great confidence in their judgment. Anxiously she and Mrs. Weems waited while the men scanned the anonymous message.

"This might be only a crank note," commented Brandon. "Someone who's read of Mr. Parker's disappearance, and hopes to pick up a little cash."

"Then you don't think it came from the tire-theft gang?" Penny asked.

"Not likely. A professional kidnaper never would have sent a note like this. The handwriting hasn't even been disguised."

"Will it be possible to trace the person?"

"It should be if we have a little luck." Detective Brandon pocketed the letter. "Now this is what you must do, Miss Parker. Offer a reward—say five thousand dollars—for information about your father."

"I'll get the story in every edition of the *Star* tomorrow. And then what am I to do?"

"You'll likely hear from the writer of this anonymous message, either by letter or telephone. If you contact the woman, arrange a meeting. Then notify us immediately."

The discussion went on. When at length the two detectives left, Penny and Mrs. Weems were hopeful that within another twenty-four hours they might know Mr. Parker's fate.

In the morning, after only five hours of sleep, Penny was back at her desk. Her first act was to dictate the story offering a five-thousand-dollar reward for information about her father. Not even to Salt Sommers did she confide that she had received an anonymous message.

"Everything's going well here at the plant," he assured her. "Harley Schirr hasn't so much as stuck his nose through the door."

"I hope we're through with him," replied Penny soberly. "However, I don't feel that we are. By the way, no telegram has come from Jerry?"

"No message yet. Guess he didn't get your wire."

Throughout the morning, Penny worked tirelessly at her desk. Although her father's office now was vacant, she did not take possession. Even when she occasionally entered to get papers from the file, it

gave her a queer, tight feeling. Her father's old neck-scarf still hung on the clothes tree. The rubbers he hated to wear stood heel to heel against the wall.

"Dad is alive and well," she told herself whenever her courage faltered. "By tomorrow he'll be back. I know he will."

At noon Salt brought Penny a sandwich which she ate without leaving her desk. As she struggled with the last mouthful, the telephone rang.

"Is this Miss Parker?" inquired a woman's voice.

Penny gripped the receiver tightly. Her pulse began to pound. Although she had no real reason for thinking so, she suddenly knew that she was in contact with the mysterious writer of the anonymous message.

"Yes," she replied, keeping her voice calm.

"You offered a reward in your paper today. Five thousand dollars for information about Mr. Parker."

"True. Can you tell me anything about his disappearance?"

"I can if you're willing to pay the money."

"I'll be glad to do it."

"And no questions asked?"

"No questions," Penny promised. "If you actually can provide information that will help me find my father, I'll be happy to give you the money."

There was a long silence. Fearful lest the woman had lost her nerve and was about to hang up, Penny said anxiously:

"Where shall I meet you? Will you come to my home?"

"That's too risky."

"Then where shall I meet you?"

"Tonight at eight. You know the cemetery out on Baldiff Road?"

"Baldiff Road?" Penny repeated doubtfully.

"You'll find it on a county map," the woman instructed. "Meet me at the cemetery wall promptly at eight. And don't bring anyone with you. Just the money. I'll guarantee to tell you where you can find your father."

The receiver clicked.

Greatly excited, Penny made a futile attempt to trace the telephone call. Failing, she set off for the police station to talk to Detectives Fuller and Brandon.

"The woman must be a rank amateur or she wouldn't have arranged a meeting in the way she did!" Detective Brandon assured Penny. "Now let's find out where Baldiff Road is located."

Using a large map, he circled an area several miles south of Riverview. Penny was surprised to note that Baldiff Road branched off from the same deserted thoroughfare which she and Louise had followed on the night of the blizzard. The cemetery, Oakland Hills, was situated perhaps a mile from the old Harrison place where Mose Johnson had claimed to have seen a ghost.

"It shouldn't be hard to nab the woman when she shows up," Detective Fuller declared. "Dick and I will get there early and keep watch."

"Just what am I to do?" Penny inquired. "Shall I take the reward money with me?"

"We'll give you a package of fake money," the detective answered. "Drive to the cemetery alone at the appointed hour. If the woman shows up, talk to her, try to learn what she knows. We'll attend to the rest."

Penny returned home to consult with Mrs. Weems. How to reach the cemetery was something of a problem. Her own car, minus its wheels, remained at the Yacht Club, and Mr. Parker's automobile had been hauled to a garage for extensive repairs.

"Can't you borrow a car from someone at the *Star* office?" suggested the housekeeper. "And do take a man with you when you drive to the cemetery."

"No, I must go alone," insisted Penny. "That part is very important."

In the end she was able to borrow Salt Sommer's coupe. A little after seven o'clock she set off for Baldiff Road with the package of fake money in her possession. The night was not cold, but a stiff wind blew through the evergreens; whirlwinds of snow chased one another across the untraveled road.

"What a dreary place for a meeting," Penny shivered as she glimpsed the bleak cemetery on a hilltop.

The area, a full half-mile from any house, was bounded by a high snow-covered brick wall. Beyond the barrier, starlight revealed a cluster of rounding tombstones layered with white. No one was visible, neither the woman nor members of the police force.

Penny glanced at her watch. It lacked ten minutes of eight o'clock. She parked not far from the cemetery entrance and switched off the engine.

Twenty minutes elapsed. Nervous and cold, Penny climbed from the car and tramped back and forth to restore circulation. She had begun to doubt that the woman would keep the appointment.

Then, coming swiftly down the road, she saw a strange looking figure. The one who approached wore a long, tight-fitting coat. A hat with a dark veil covered the woman's face.

"There she is!" thought Penny, every nerve tense.

The woman came closer. While still some distance from the cemetery entrance, she suddenly paused. Her head jerked sideways. Then to Penny's dismay, she turned and fled toward the woods.

"Wait!" Penny shouted. "Don't be afraid! Wait!"

The woman paid no heed. Lifting her coat the better to run, she disappeared among the trees.

CHAPTER

12

FLIGHT

AS PENNY wondered what to do, Detectives Brandon and Fuller leaped from their hiding place behind the cemetery wall. Their car had been secreted in a clump of bushes farther down the road. By pure mischance, the woman in the black veil had seen it as she approached, and fearing treachery, had fled.

"Quick, Dick, or she'll get away!" Fuller shouted.

Penny did not join in the pursuit. Reentering her car, she waited anxiously. From the crashing of underbrush, she knew the detectives were having difficulty in following the woman. In the dark forest it would be very easy for her to elude the officers.

Three quarters of an hour elapsed before the men returned.

"We lost her," Detective Brandon reported. "No use searching any longer."

Sick at heart, Penny drove slowly toward home.

Her hopes had been completely dashed. Not only had she failed to contact the mysterious woman, but there now seemed little likelihood of doing so.

"I may receive another telephone message," she thought, "but I doubt it. That woman probably will be too badly frightened to try to contact me again."

At the exit of Baldiff Road, Penny headed down the winding hillside highway which she and Louise had followed on the night of the blizzard. The route, although slightly longer, would take her close to the Riverview Yacht Club.

"I'll go that way and see if my car is still there," she decided. "Then tomorrow I can have it hauled home and jacked up. I should have looked after the matter long ago."

The coupe rounded a curve and the road dipped between an avenue of swaying, whispering pines. To the left, shrouded in snow, loomed the old Harrison house. The estate was picturesque in itself, and Mose Johnson's tale about a ghost had intensified the girl's interest.

"Wonder who owns the place now?" she speculated. "Probably not any member of the Harrison family, as I believe they were old-timers in Riverview."

Penny slowed the car to idling speed. Deliberately keeping to the left hand side of the road, she studied with deep interest the long, snow-frosted fence which

bounded the grounds. The barrier was an unfriendly one, high and spiked at the top.

Suddenly her attention focused upon a well-beaten path in the snow just inside the fence. The footprints, plainly visible in the bright moonlight, extended the full width of the grounds.

Into Penny's mind flashed the wild yarn told by Mose Johnson.

"Ghost tracks!" she thought. "At least those prints must have been made by whatever he saw beyond the gate."

So interested was Penny in the path that for an instant she completely forgot her driving. The front left wheel of the car struck a tiny mound of ice and snow at the road's edge.

Barely in time to avoid an accident, the girl twisted the steering wheel and brought the car back on the highway.

"Another second and I'd have been in the ditch!" she thought shakily. "If I must look for a ghost, guess I'll do the job right."

Penny pulled up, this time at the opposite side of the road. Getting out, she crossed to the iron fence and peered through it. The path which had attracted her attention had been pounded hard by someone who had walked just inside the enclosure.

"Odd!" she reflected. "Maybe Old Mose's ghost has more substance than I thought."

Penny glanced toward the big house, dark and majestic in its setting of evergreens. Obviously the place had been closed for the winter. Walks were not shoveled, blinds had been drawn, and no tire tracks led to and from the three-car garage.

"Wonder who or what could have made that path?" she mused. "Certainly not an animal."

Unable to solve the mystery, Penny turned to reenter the parked coupe. Before she could cross the road, a light went on in a third floor room of the estate house. Startled, she stared at it. As she watched, it was extinguished.

"Someone must live here!" thought Penny. "Or am I seeing spooks myself?"

For a long while she watched the upper floor of the house. The light did not reappear. At length, wearying of the vigil, she returned to the car.

Penny started the engine and bent down to open the fins of the heater. Straightening, she cast a last, careless glance toward the old estate. Her heart did a flip-flop.

Beyond the iron gate, in the garden area, a white-robed figure slowly paced back and forth!

"My Aunt!" whispered Penny. "Am I seeing things or am I seeing things?"

For a moment she sat very straight, watching. The ghostly figure, white from head to toe, moved with measured steps toward the high gate.

"There aren't any ghosts," she encouraged herself. "But if that's not a spook, it must be someone dressed up like one! And who would play Hallowe'en games on a cold night like this?"

Alone, frankly nervous, Penny had no overpowering desire to investigate the white-robed figure at close range. A large, spreading evergreen half-blocked her view of the gate. She could not see the ghost plainly, but she distinctly heard the rattle of a chain as the apparition tested the lock.

"Real or imaginary, that spook is trying to get out!" Penny thought with a shiver. "If Mose were here now I'd challenge him to a race!"

The white-gowned figure shook the gate chain a second time, then slowly retreated. Penny watched for a moment, before abruptly swinging open the car door. She had decided to investigate.

As she crossed the road, the white figure moved away from her. By the time she reached the gate, it had disappeared around a corner of the house.

"At least Mr. Spook wasn't carrying his own tombstone!" Penny observed to herself. "Mose exaggerated that part."

She waited, leaning against the gate post. Within three minutes a light went on in the upper part of the house. For a fleeting instant before the blind was pulled, she saw someone standing in front of an old-fashioned dresser.

"Mr. Ghost seemingly has turned in for the night," thought Penny. "But is it a he, she, or it?"

Soon the bedroom light was extinguished. Cold and tired, Penny decided that the mystery must remain unsolved. However, as she drove on, she kept thinking about what she had seen. Of one thing she now was certain. The estate was not deserted!

Without stopping at the Yacht Club grounds, Penny made certain that her stripped car and ice boat remained as she last had seen them. Driving on to Riverview, she left Salt's car at the *Star* plant, then taxied home to tell Mrs. Weems of her failure at the cemetery.

"Don't feel badly about it," the housekeeper comforted. "Surely the woman who telephoned will make another attempt to reach you."

"I doubt it," Penny replied gloomily. "She'll know now that the police are watching for her."

"This entire affair is so bewildering," sighed Mrs. Weems. "How could your father have been kidnaped? If what we've learned is true, he left the scene of the accident of his own free will."

"I never was so baffled in my life," Penny returned, throwing herself on the davenport. "I used to think I was good at solving puzzles. Now I know I'm just plain dumb."

"Have you thought about employing a private detective?"

"It might be a good idea!" Penny agreed, encouraged. "I'll see what I can do tomorrow."

As she started wearily up the stairs to bed, Mrs. Weems called after her to say that Louise Sidell had telephoned earlier in the evening. Penny nodded absently, assuming that her chum had phoned to express sympathy. She did not think of the matter again until the next morning at breakfast. As she was leaving the table, Mrs. Weems came in to report that Louise once more was on the telephone.

"Penny, I can't tell you how shocked I was to learn about your father," her chum began breathlessly. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

"I'm afraid not, Lou."

"What are you using for a car? You must need one badly."

"Salt Sommers let me have his last night. I'll get along."

"Penny, I know how you can buy tires!" Louise went on. "In fact, that's what I wanted to talk to you about."

"How can I buy tires? Rubber is supposed to be scarce."

"When I was having my hair fixed at the beauty parlor yesterday I heard two women talking!" Louise declared excitedly. "It seems there's a garage where you can get them if you pull the right strings!"

"Oh! A Black Market place?"

"I suppose that's what you would call it."

"I don't want to get tires illegally," Penny said. "I'm not interested, Lou."

"You don't even care to know the name of the garage?"

"What good would it do?"

"None perhaps, but it might give you a surprise."

"A surprise?" Penny repeated. She glanced at the clock, impatient because the conversation was being prolonged. A great deal of important work awaited her.

"You don't want to know the name of the place?" Louise persisted.

"Yes, I do. On second thought, it might be well worth while to find out what I can about Black Market operations in tires."

The conviction had come suddenly to Penny that all the evidence contained in her father's lost portfolio must be gathered anew. No word had been received from Jerry Livingston. In the quest for information, she must depend upon her own efforts.

"It's going to give you a real shock to learn the name of the place," Louise went on.

"I'm shock proof by this time," answered Penny. "Let 'er fly."

But Louise was unwilling to divulge the information over the telephone.

"I don't dare tell you now," she replied. "Just sit tight for ten minutes and I'll deliver my bombshell in person."

CHAPTER

13

A BLACK MARKET

TEN MINUTES later Louise was at the front door with the Sidell family car. She tooted the horn until Penny put on her coat and went outside.

"Jump in and I'll take you to the place of mystery," Louise greeted her. "On second thought, you'd better drive. I hate icy roads."

Penny slid behind the steering wheel. "But where are we going?" she protested. "Honestly, Lou, I haven't much time—"

"Mattie Williams' garage is the place that sells the tires! Now, are you interested?"

"Am I? Why, we stopped there with Salt Sommers!"

"We did indeed. Remember the big truck?"

"Lou, you may have stumbled into something really important!"

"Glad you think so, chum. But you're not interested in Black Markets."

"I've changed my mind! I want to talk to Mattie Williams right away!"

Penny started the car. Driving with a mechanical, unthinking efficiency born of many years' practice, she questioned Louise as to the source of her information. The girls were deep in a discussion when they heard someone shout. Salt Sommers had hailed them from the curb.

"Why, hello," Penny greeted him, stopping the car with a jerk. "Any trouble at the *Star?*"

"Not from Schirr," grinned Salt. "I'm hot-footing it to the Ladies Club to mug some dames pouring tea! For the society page."

"Poor Salt!" smiled Penny, knowing how he hated trivial assignments.

"On your way to the office?" the photographer questioned.

Penny hesitated, then decided to confide in Salt. She repeated what Louise had told her about the Mattie Williams' garage.

"Well, can you beat that!" the photographer exclaimed. "I don't know Mattie and her partner well, but I always supposed they were honest. So they're dealing in stolen tires!"

"We don't know for sure," Penny said hastily. "Our information is mostly founded on rumor."

"And the tires may not be stolen ones," contributed Louise. "I only heard they can be bought there."

Penny added that she would not take time to run down the Black Market story save that her father's disappearance might have a connection with the tire-thief gang.

"I aim to learn the names of those men Dad intended to expose," she said earnestly.

Somewhat startled by the grim note of Penny's voice, Salt warned her that she might be venturing on dangerous ground.

"We all admire your courage," he said, "but you mustn't take foolish risks. Your father would turn thumbs down on that idea."

"It's because of Dad that I must investigate every angle of the tire-theft racket."

"Quite an ambitious assignment," Salt said dryly. "Now as soon as Jerry gets back from Canada—"

"We can't wait! Something has to be done right away!"

"I know how you feel," responded Salt, "but there's such a thing as being too courageous."

"I'm not courageous," Penny denied. "Last night at the cemetery I was scared half to death. And then when I saw the ghost—"

"What ghost?" interrupted Louise.

Penny had not intended to speak of what she had seen at the Harrison estate. The slip of tongue made it necessary to tell of the path by the gate, the retreating figure, and the mysterious light.

"That's funny," commented the photographer, regarding her with a peculiar expression. "Since I've been on duty at the observation tower I've never seen any activity at the estate."

"I don't believe in ghosts, but I saw one all the same!" Penny insisted. "Just watch some night and see for yourself!"

Annoyed by Salt's smile, she shifted gears and drove on down the street. Turning to Louise, she asked earnestly: "You believe I saw something wandering about the estate last night, don't you?"

"Well," Louise hesitated, unwilling to offend her chum. "You must have been quite upset after failing to meet that woman at the cemetery. Under the circumstances . . ."

"I was as calm as I am now," Penny cried indignantly. "I saw it, I tell you!"

"Of course you did, dear," Louise soothed. "Do please watch your driving more carefully, or I'll have to take over."

Penny suddenly relaxed. "Okay, have it your own way," she shrugged. "I wouldn't believe Mose Johnson, so why should you believe me? It's just one of those things."

For a long while they rode in silence. Few cars were on the road and there was little business activity at Kamm's Corner. Penny parked in front of the Mattie Williams' garage.

"What excuse will we have for questioning her?" Louise asked dubiously.

"I'm not going to make an excuse," said Penny. "I'll just come right out and ask her if she sells tires without a special order."

The girls entered the warm little office, stamping snow from their galoshes.

"Just a minute," called a voice which belonged to Mattie Williams.

The garage owner was busy with a customer. Soon however, she came in from the main part of the building, wiping her oily hands on a piece of waste.

"What can I do for you?" she inquired briskly.

"You remember us, don't you?" asked Penny, leading into the subject of tires as gradually as possible. "We're friends of Salt Sommers."

"Oh, sure!" the woman's face lighted. "You came in with him the night of the bad storm."

"My car had been stripped of its tires. Ever since, I've been wondering how to get new ones."

A slightly guarded expression came over Mattie Williams' face. She said nothing.

"I was told I might obtain some here," Penny plunged on.

"You can," said Mattie. "Provided you have an order from your Ration Board."

"Not without it?"

Mattie gazed at Penny with undisguised scorn. "What sort of a place do you think we run here?" she demanded. "Of course we don't sell tires without an order."

"But we were told—"

"Well, you were told wrong," snapped Mattie. "Sorry. I can't help you."

Picking up a wrench from the desk top, the woman left the office.

"I guess I didn't approach her the right way," remarked Penny sadly. "Either that, or our information was incorrect. Louise, are you sure—"

"Oh, I am!" her chum insisted. "The two women I overheard, distinctly said Mattie Williams' garage. Of course, they might have been wrong about it."

Before Penny and Louise could leave the office, a middle-aged man with glasses came in through the street door.

"Sam Burkholder here?" he demanded, warming himself by the stove.

Penny started to say that she did not know. Just then Mattie Williams' partner came in the other door.

"Hi, Sam!" the stranger greeted him. "I've got the car parked around back. Are you ready to put on that tire?"

Sam frowned, darting a quick glance at the two girls.

"Oh, the one I patched for you!" he returned. "Sure, it's fixed. Drive your car in the back entrance and I'll take care of it."

Both men went out into the main part of the garage. Just beyond the door they paused for a whispered conference, then separated.

"Shall we go?" inquired Louise, glancing at her chum.

"Not just yet," replied Penny. "I'm curious to see that patched tire. Let's kill a little more time here."

Pretending to warm themselves by the stove, they waited ten minutes. Then, without attracting attention, they sauntered out onto the main garage floor. Mattie Williams was busy washing a car and did not see them.

The garage workroom was divided into sections, separated by a double door which was closed. Penny strolled over and pushed it open just enough to see through the crack.

Sam Burkholder was working on the stranger's car. He had removed an old tire and wheel, and was replacing it with one whose tread appeared new.

"A patched tire, my left eye!" Penny whispered to Louise. "It's just as we thought! This garage must be a Black Market place!"

CHAPTER

14

A FAMILIAR FIGURE

ONLY FOR a moment did the girls dare remain at the door watching Sam Burkholder mount the tire. Then, their curiosity satisfied, they moved quietly away. Without speaking to Mattie Williams, they returned to the parked automobile.

"Well, wasn't I right?" Louise demanded triumphantly. "What do you think we should do?"

The question plagued Penny. "I don't know," she confessed. "If only we were absolutely sure the tire was new—"

"It certainly looked new."

"Yes, but it could have had some wear. It's possible, too, that the customer had a legal right to buy a new tire."

"Then you don't intend to report to the police, Penny?"

"I want to talk to Salt about it first. We must move carefully, Lou. You see, my main objective is

to learn the names of the higher-ups involved in the tire-theft racket."

"And where does this garage fit into the picture?"

"If it fits at all, my guess is that Sam and Mattie are buying illegal tires—perhaps from the same men who stripped my car and threatened Dad."

Driving slowly toward Riverview, Penny reviewed what she had seen. She was convinced the information was valuable, yet she scarcely knew how to use it.

"If Salt suggests that I report to the police, that's what I'll do," she decided.

Enroute home, Penny stopped at another garage to make arrangements to have her stripped coupe hauled into the city.

"How about the *Icicle?*" Louise asked, thinking her chum had forgotten the iceboat.

"It will have to stay where it is for the time being," Penny replied. "If it's stolen, I won't much care."

At the Sidell home, the girls separated. Thanking Louise for the use of the car, Penny returned afoot to the *Star* office. Salt Sommers was absent on assignment, so she did not linger long. As she rounded a street corner on her way home, a newsboy for a rival paper blocked her path.

"Read all about it!" he shouted. "Anthony Parker Believed Kidnaped! Paper, Miss?"

Penny dropped a coin into the lad's hand and hastily scanned the front page. The story of her father's disappearance was a highly colored account, but contained not a useful item of information. Tossing the sheet into a street paper-container, she moved on.

She was passing the Gillman Department Store when her attention was drawn to a woman who waited for a bus.

"I've seen her somewhere before," thought Penny, pausing. "Last night—"

The woman wore a small black hat and a long, old-fashioned dark coat which came nearly to her ankles. It was the shape of the garment and its unusual length which struck Penny as familiar. Why, the woman resembled the one who had fled from the cemetery!

Penny pretended to gaze into the store window. Actually she studied the woman from every angle. She might have been forty-seven years of age and was large-boned. Her face was heavily lined, and her long hands were covered by a pair of cheap, black cotton gloves.

"Can it be the same woman?" thought Penny in perplexity.

A bus bearing a county placard glided up to the curb. The woman in black was the only passenger to board it.

"That bus goes out toward Baldiff Road and the cemetery!" Penny told herself. "And that's where I'm going too!"

An instant before the folding doors slammed shut, she sprang aboard. Paying her fare, she sought a seat at the rear of the bus.

No sooner was the coach in motion than Penny regretted her hasty action. What could she hope to gain by pursuing the strange woman? She was not certain enough of her identification to make a direct accusation. County buses ran infrequently. In all likelihood, she would find herself stranded in the country.

Penny arose to leave the bus. Then changing her mind a second time, she sat down. Try as she would, she could not rid herself of a conviction that the woman she followed was the same one who had visited the cemetery.

The bus made few stops in the city. Once beyond the city limits, it sped along at a brisk speed. To Penny's satisfaction, the woman in black soon began to gather up her packages. She pressed a button and the bus skidded to a stop at a crossroads.

With no show of haste, Penny followed the woman from the bus. Pretending to enter a grocery store at the corner, she waited and watched.

Apparently the woman lived nearby, for she started

off down a narrow, winding road which ran at right angles to the main highway.

"Why that's the road that runs past the Harrison place," Penny thought. "Wonder if she can be going there?"

Waiting until the woman was nearly out of sight, she trudged after her. Walking was difficult for the road had not been cleared by a snow plow. Fortunately for Penny, the woman did not once glance behind her. She kept steadily on until she came within view of the big estate house on the hill. Just before she reached the boundary fence, she cut across a field, approaching the dwelling from the rear.

Penny remained at the road, watching. The woman took a key from her pocket, unlocking a small, padlocked gate at the rear of the grounds. She snapped the lock shut again, and disappeared into the house.

Penny perched herself on top of an old-fashioned rail fence to think over what she had seen. The woman, whoever she was, obviously lived at the estate. Yet the cheap quality of her clothing suggested that she could not be the owner of such an expensive establishment.

"Probably a servant or caretaker," Penny reasoned. "But is she the one who ran away last night?"

Far over the hills in a lonely grove of pines stood Oakland Cemetery. On either side of Baldiff Road

stretched dense woods, a growth that crept to the very boundaries of the Harrison estate. Penny instantly noted that it would be possible for a person to flee from the cemetery to the very door of the estate without once leaving the shelter of trees.

"Perhaps it was the same woman!" she thought. "If she lives here, it would be logical for her to specify Oakland Cemetery as a meeting place! And escape would be easy for her, too!"

Penny slid down from the fence. It would do no good to question the woman. Rather, if she were guilty, questions might serve to place her on the alert. Far better, she reasoned, to bide her time.

"I'll learn everything I can about that woman," she thought. "Tonight I'll watch the house."

In making her plans, Penny did not take into account Mrs. Weems' attitude. Upon reaching home late in the afternoon, she found the housekeeper in a most discouraged mood. No favorable news had been received from any source.

"I've been worried about you too, Penny," Mrs. Weems confessed. "Where did you go after you left the *Star* office?"

Penny told of her trip to Mattie Williams' garage and later to the Harrison estate. In particular she described the mysterious woman she had followed by bus.

"I plan to go back there tonight," she concluded.

"For the first time since Dad disappeared, I feel I may have stumbled into a valuable clue!"

Mrs. Weems looked troubled. "But Penny," she protested, "you can't go to the estate alone!"

"I thought perhaps Louise would accompany me."

"Two girls alone at night! I can't give my consent, Penny. It's not safe."

"But I don't wish to call the police just yet, Mrs. Weems. I've no real evidence. Will you come with me?"

The housekeeper hesitated. Naturally a timid woman, she had no desire to stir from her own fireside that night. But she knew where her duty lay.

"Yes, I'll go with you, Penny," she consented. "Shall we start soon?"

"Not until after dark. One can't expect a ghost to show up in broad daylight."

"A ghost!" Mrs. Weems quavered. "Penny, what are you letting me in for?"

"Frankly, I don't know. Some strange things have been going on at the Harrison estate. Tonight I hope to solve part of the mystery at least."

Pressed for an explanation, Penny repeated Mose Johnson's story and told of seeing the strange white-robed figure with her own eyes. The tale did not add to Mrs. Weems' comfort of mind.

"We're crazy to go out there," the housekeeper protested. "Must we do it?"

"I think it may be our one hope of gaining a clue which will lead to Dad."

"Then I'm willing to risk it," agreed Mrs. Weems. "However, we'll drive out in a taxi. And I shall personally select the driver—a man to be depended on in an emergency."

So excited was the housekeeper that she had difficulty in preparing the evening meal. In the end Penny took over, shooing her out of the kitchen.

"I declare I don't know why I am so nervous," Mrs. Weems shivered. "I haven't felt so shaky since the time I attended a seance at Osandra's."

"You saw ghosts a-plenty on that occasion," smiled Penny. "I only hope we have as much luck tonight."

By eight o'clock everything was in readiness for the journey into the country. Dressing warmly and carrying an extra blanket, Penny and Mrs. Weems walked to a nearby cab station. There the housekeeper selected a driver, a burly man who looked as if he might have been an ex-prizefighter.

"Sure, Ma'am," he said as Mrs. Weems questioned him, "you can depend on me to look after you."

"How are you at capturing ghosts?" inquired Penny, climbing into the cab.

The driver looked a trifle startled. "Swell!" he rejoined. "Bring on your spook, and if he don't weigh no more than two hundred pounds, I'll nail him!"

Penny and Mrs. Weems were satisfied that they were in good hands. They instructed the man, Joe Henkell, to drive directly to the old Harrison estate.

"By the way, do you know who owns the property?" Penny asked as the cab rolled toward the country.

"Fellow from the East," Joe flung over his shoulder. "I'm not sure. Think his name is Deming—George Allan Deming. Wealthy sportsman. Has his own plane an' everything."

"Married?"

"Couldn't tell you. The estate has been closed up this winter."

The cab soon approached the familiar grounds. Penny directed the driver to pull up some distance from the dark house.

"Switch off the headlights," she instructed. "We'll wait here. It may be a long time too, so make yourself comfortable."

Joe, taking Penny at her word, began to smoke a vile-smelling cigar which nearly drove Mrs. Weems to distraction. After an hour had elapsed, the housekeeper scarcely could endure the stuffy air of the cab.

"Penny, must we wait any longer?" she asked plaintively.

"Why, it's early, Mrs. Weems. I expect to stay until midnight at least."

"Midnight!" The housekeeper quietly collapsed.

Just then the cab driver turned around, touching Penny's arm. He directed her attention to the house by saying briefly: "A light just went on."

Penny and Mrs. Weems focused their attention on the upper floor of the estate. A single light could be seen burning there, but as they watched it blinked off.

"Now if a ghost is to appear this is the time!" announced Penny. "Why don't we get closer?"

She sprang from the cab. Mrs. Weems and the taxi driver followed with less enthusiasm. The housekeeper, quivering and shaking, clutched the man's arm as she struggled against the wind.

"Joe, you stay right beside me!" she ordered.

"Sure, Ma'am," he said soothingly. "I couldn't get away if I had a mind to."

Penny, a step ahead, held up her hand as a warning for silence. She had seen the familiar white figure rounding a corner of the house.

"There's the ghost!" she whispered. "See! Beyond the gate!"

Joe whistled softly.

"A spook, sure's I'm alive!" he muttered.

"And you promised to nail him," reminded Penny, starting forward along the fence. "We'll creep a little closer. Then Joe, I shall expect you to do your stuff!"

CHAPTER

15

GHOST IN THE GARDEN

THE THREE investigators moved stealthily along the high fence. Through the iron palings they could see a white-garbed figure walking with measured tread amid the shrubs of the frozen garden. Back and forth the apparition strolled, following a well-trod path between the shrunken snowdrifts.

Penny, Mrs. Weems, and the taxi driver crept closer. The ghostly one did not note their approach. Hooded head bent low, he glided to the gate, testing chain and padlock.

"Poor restless soul!" whispered Mrs. Weems.

Penny gave the housekeeper a tiny pinch to break the spell which had fallen upon her. "That's no ghost," she whispered. "Don't you see! It's a man wearing a heavy white bathrobe over his clothing. He's pulled the wide collar up over his head like a hood!"

"It's a man all right," added the taxi driver. "You

can tell by the way he walks. Ghosts kinda slither, don't they?"

"I believe it's someone imprisoned on the grounds!" Penny whispered tensely. "Watch!"

The ghost, his face shadowed, rattled the chain again. Then with a distinct, audible sigh, he turned and tramped back along the fence away from the gate.

"Aw, that spook could get out if he wanted to," muttered the taxi driver. "Why don't he climb over the fence?"

"Perhaps the man is a sleep walker," suggested Mrs. Weems nervously. "Whoever he is, the poor fellow should be in his bed."

Penny was determined to learn the identity of the man. Moving to the gate, she called softly. The figure in white whirled around, looking straight toward her.

Penny caught a fleeting impression of a lean, startled face. Then the man turned and fled toward the house. No longer could there be any doubt that he was a man, for as he ran the legs of his woolen pajamas showed beneath the white robe.

"Wait!" Penny called. "Please wait!"

The ghostly one hesitated, and glanced over his shoulder. But the next moment he was gone, having vanished through a side door into the house.

Penny, weak from excitement, clung to the gate. "Mrs. Weems!" she cried. "Did you see him?"

"Yes, you frightened him away when you shouted."

"But didn't you notice his face? As he turned toward me, I caught a glimpse of it. Mrs. Weems, the man looked like Dad!"

"Oh, Penny," the housekeeper murmured, taking her arm, "you can't be right. How could it be your father?"

"It looked like him."

"Not to me," said Mrs. Weems firmly. "Why, if it had been Mr. Parker, he would have answered when you called. He wouldn't have run away."

Penny was compelled to acknowledge the logic of the housekeeper's reasoning. "I guess that's true," she said reluctantly. "I'll admit I didn't see his face plainly. I wanted it to be Dad so badly I may have imagined the resemblance."

A light was switched on in an upstairs room of the estate house. However, blinds were lowered, and those on the ground did not obtain another glimpse of the mysterious man who haunted the snowy garden. Finally Mrs. Weems induced Penny to return to the taxi.

Speeding toward Riverview, neither of them had much to say. Penny could not blot from her mind the vision of a startled, bewildered face. Reason told her that Mrs. Weems was right—the man could not be her father. Who then, was he? Why had he refused to talk to her at the gate?

"The man may have been a sleep walker," she thought. "Possibly the owner of the estate, Mr. Deming."

The cab had reached the business section of Riverview. Upon impulse Penny decided to stop at the *Star* plant to make sure that everything was going well.

"It won't take me long," she assured Mrs. Weems. "Why don't you wait in the cab?"

Only a skeleton night force was on duty at the *Star* office. The advertising department had been closed, and on the floor above, scrub women were busy mopping up. A sleepy-eyed desk man greeted Penny as she entered the deserted newsroom.

"Everything's Okay," he assured her. "The final edition's out, and most of the boys have gone home. I was just taking a little cat nap."

"Any news?"

"Not about your father. The police have been kept busy chasing down false rumors. About four hours ago a report came in your father had been seen in Chicago."

"Chicago!"

"Just a fake report."

"Oh, I see," said Penny weakly. "No word from Jerry, I suppose?"

The deskman shook his head. "Plenty of mail for you though."

"Anything important?"

"Mostly replies to that reward offer you made. A lot of 'em are screwball letters. Your father's been seen in every section of the city from the river to the Heights."

"Where is the mail?"

"I dumped it on your father's desk."

"I'll take it home to read," Penny said. "By going through every letter carefully I may stumble upon a clue."

She crossed the newsroom and opened the door of her father's office.

The light was not on. Groping for the wall switch, her keen ears detected stealthy steps moving away from her. Sensing the presence of someone in the room she called sharply: "Who's here?"

There was no reply. Across the room, a door softly opened and clicked shut. Penny was startled. Although the private office had two entrances, one leading directly into the hall, the latter had not been used in years. Usually the door was locked and a clothes tree stood in front of it.

Her groping fingers found the switch and she flooded the room with light. A glance revealed that mail lying on the desk had been disturbed. One of the top drawers remained open. The clothes tree had been moved from in front of the hall door. Plainly, someone had just fled from the room!

Darting to the corridor door, Penny jerked it open. No one was in sight. However, at the end of the deserted hall, she saw the elevator cage moving slowly downward.

"I'll get that fellow yet!" she thought grimly.

Taking the hall at a run, she plunged down the stairway two steps at a time. Breathless but triumphant, she reached the lower corridor just as the cage stopped with a jerk.

Harley Schirr stepped out, closing the grilled door behind him.

"Fancy meeting you here!" said Penny, her eyes flashing. "What were you doing in my father's office?"

Schirr regarded her coolly. Without answering, he tried to brush past her.

"You were looking for something in Dad's desk!" Penny accused, blocking the way. "I know how you got in too! Through the hall entrance. You're such a professional snooper you probably have a skeleton key that unlocks half the doors in the building!"

"I've had about enough of your insolence!" Schirr retorted. "There's no law which says I can't come to this plant. And speaking of law, I may sue you for libel."

"What a laugh."

"You'll not be laughing in a few days, Miss Parker!

Oh, no! I've hired a lawyer, and we're preparing our case. You've insulted me, humiliated me in the eyes of my fellow newspapermen, but you'll have to pay. And pay handsomely!"

The threat failed to disturb Penny. Schirr, determined to wound her deeply, went on with grim satisfaction.

"You kid yourself you'll see your father again," he jeered. "Well, you won't! Mr. Parker is dead and you may as well get used to the idea."

Penny's eyes burned. "You say that only to torture me!"

"It's the truth. If you weren't so blind you'd acknowledge it. Your father tried to run a gang of professional tire-thieves out of this town, and they did for him."

"You seem very certain of your facts, Mr. Schirr. Perhaps you know some of the higher-ups personally."

"How would I?"

"Your knowledge is so complete," Penny said scathingly.

"I'm only telling you my opinion," Schirr growled, now on the defensive. "If you want to ride along in a sweet dream that's Okay with me."

"I want to get at the truth," said Penny shortly. "Do you have one scrap of evidence that Dad has fallen into the hands of enemies?"

Schirr hesitated, knowing well that an affirmative answer might lead to questioning from the police.

"I don't have any knowledge of the case," he said. "At least not for publication!"

Flashing a superior smile, he pushed past Penny, and went out of the building.

CHAPTER

16

A DOOR IN A BOX

PENNY SCARCELY knew what to think of Harley Schirr's actions. All her accusations were true, of that she was sure. But she was unable to decide whether or not he had any information about her father's strange disappearance.

"The old snooper may be hand in glove with the tire thieves!" she thought bitterly. "I wouldn't put it past him. If I could prove anything, wouldn't I like to turn him over to the police!"

Climbing the stairs, Penny explained briefly to the *Star* deskman what had occurred.

"Shirr here again!" he exclaimed. "Why, I'm sure he never came through the newsroom."

"No, he got into Dad's office by means of that old hall door. Tomorrow I want a new lock put on."

"I'll have it taken care of myself," promised the deskman.

Reentering her father's office, Penny gathered up

the mail and carefully locked both doors. She then returned to the waiting taxicab. During the ride home she made no mention of Mr. Schirr, preferring not to worry the housekeeper.

Later in Mr. Parker's study, she and Mrs. Weems examined every letter written in response to the reward offer. Not even one of them offered the slightest promise.

"I'll turn everything over to the police," Penny said with a sigh. "Maybe they'll find a clue I've not considered important."

Both she and Mrs. Weems were feeling the effects of such a long period of strain. Meals had been irregular, appetites poor. Penny in particular had lost so much weight that she looked thin and sallow. Yet somehow she managed to keep up her strength and to face each day with hope.

"Mrs. Weems," she said the next morning at breakfast, "if you'll advance me some money, I'm going on another taxi jaunt today."

"Not to the Harrison place."

"No, out to Mattie Williams' garage. I'm convinced that place is dealing in stolen tires. If only I can reconstruct the evidence which disappeared in Dad's portfolio, I may get a clue that will lead to him."

Without protest, Mrs. Weems gave Penny the money. Secretly she thought that the girl would do much better to turn all of her information over to the

police. However, she realized that Penny needed activity to keep her from brooding, so she wisely did not discourage her.

"Don't get into any trouble," she warned anxiously.

"No danger of that, Mrs. Weems. I've not enough pep for it these days."

Engaging the same cabman who had served her so well the previous night, Penny motored to the Williams' garage. She had made no plans and scarcely knew what she would say when she entered the place. As she debated, the big doors of the building opened, and a tow car drove away with Mattie at the wheel.

"There she goes!" thought Penny, disappointed. "I'm afraid my interview will have to wait."

Getting out, she sauntered into the garage office. Mattie's partner, Sam, was nowhere to be seen. Nor did he appear to be working in the main part of the building.

Penny waited a few minutes, then wandered about the floor where a number of cars had been stored. No workmen were in evidence.

"This might be a good time to do a bit of looking around!" she thought suddenly. "I'll never have a better chance."

Penny opened the doors into the room where she had observed Sam Burkholder mount a new tire on the car of a customer. One wall was stacked high with large wooden boxes, not unlike those she and Louise

had seen delivered by the truck driver, Hank Biglow, on the night of the blizzard.

She thumped one of the boxes with her knuckles. It gave off a hollow, empty sound. She tried another box with no better luck. Some of the big crates had been opened. They contained nothing except a little brown wrapping paper.

Disappointed, Penny turned away. But as she moved toward the exit, her eyes flashed upon one of the boxes which had escaped her attention. Boards were loose at one end, and could be hinged back on their nails like a door.

Intrigued, Penny crossed to the crate. As she pulled on one of the boards, all swung back as a unit.

"Why, it's like a door!" she thought. "A door in a box!"

Penny gazed into the box and was further amazed. It had no back wall. Instead, she saw a long, empty tunnel formed by several crates piled one in front of the other. And at the very end stood a real door!

"Maybe this is the pay-off!" thought Penny excitedly.

Pulling the boards into place behind her, she stooped and made her way through the tunnel to the door. It was locked.

"I'll bet a cent stolen tires are stored in that room!" reasoned Penny. "If only I could get in there!"

Her mind did not dwell long on the problem. A

moment later she was alarmed to hear a low murmur of voices. Someone was approaching the storage room from the main part of the garage. Unless she wished to be trapped in the tunnel of boxes, she must abandon the investigation!

Penny started hurriedly toward the opening. Before she could get through the tunnel, the big double doors squeaked open and she heard heavy footsteps in the room. Peering out through a knothole in one of the boxes, she saw Mattie Williams and her partner, Sam. They were arguing and their voices came to her plainly:

"Guess you didn't look for me back quite so soon, Sam," Mattie reprimanded her partner. "When I went off in the tow car you figured I'd be gone a long time. Thought it would give you a good chance to tamper with the books!"

"That's not so, Mattie. I was marking up some expenses like I always do."

"I've been aiming to have a straight talk with you for a long time, Sam," the woman resumed. "That's why I asked you to step back here in the storage room. No use having the customers know about our differences."

"I don't see what you've got to squawk about," Sam retorted. "Ain't you made more money since I teamed up with you than you ever did before?"

"Yes."

"But you're always afraid I'll cheat you out of a penny."

"I've caught you in some dishonest tricks. About those tires—"

A loud, insistent tooting of an automobile horn broke up the conversation. Abandoning the argument, Mattie and Sam went to serve the impatient customer.

Penny did not tarry. Crawling from the tunnel, she glanced about for a means of escape. Fortunately, the room had an outside exit. Making use of it, she returned to the waiting taxi, without seeing either Sam or Mattie again.

"Police station, Joe," she instructed.

"How do you want to go?" the cab driver inquired. "This road or No. 32?"

"Let's drive past the old Harrison place."

"Sure," grinned Joe. "Maybe we'll see that spook again!"

The cab bumped along the frozen road, soon coming within view of the hillside estate. Joe slowed down without being requested to do so.

"I was tellin' the boys about that place last night," he flung over his shoulder. "They tell me the owner is this guy Deming. He's gone East for the winter. A big, fat, bald-headed man."

"Our ghost was a thin person."

"Yeah, I was thinking that," agreed Joe. "Maybe Deming's got a sick relative or something."

The explanation did not satisfy Penny. With troubled eyes she gazed toward the rambling old house which by daylight looked so deserted. No smoke curled from the chimneys. Had it not been for a trail of footprints along the fence, she easily could have convinced herself that she had imagined the events of the previous night.

"Say, who's that trackin' through the fields?" Joe suddenly demanded.

Penny turned to glance in the direction that the cabman pointed. Her heart did a little flip-flop. A woman in a long black coat, market basket on her arm, was hastening toward the rear door of the estate house.

"Stop the cab, Joe!" she cried.

The car came to a halt with a little sideways skid. Leaping out, Penny plunged through the drifts and was able to confront the woman at the rear gate of the premises.

"How do you do," she greeted her breathlessly.

The woman was so startled that she nearly dropped her market basket. Confused, she stammered a reply and started to unlock the gate.

"Just a moment, please," requested Penny. "May I come inside and talk to you?"

"About what?"

"My father's disappearance. You made an appointment to meet me at the cemetery. Why did you run away?"

The bold attack was not without an effect. The woman gasped, and fumbled nervously with the key to the padlock.

"I don't know what you're talking about!" she muttered.

"Unless you tell me everything you know regarding my father's disappearance, I'll call the police!"

"The police—" the woman repeated, plainly frightened.

"Yes," Penny went on relentlessly, "this is a serious matter. It will do you no good to bluff."

The woman gave up trying to unlock the gate. Setting her basket down in the snow she said weakly: "You advertised a reward—"

"I'll still be glad to pay it for worthwhile information. What do you know about my father?"

The woman drew a deep breath. "Well, I picked him up in my car after the accident."

"You did?" Penny became jubilant. "Where is he now?"

"I can't tell you that. Mr. Parker asked me to take him to Mercy Hospital. I let him off at the entrance to the grounds. That's the last I saw of him."

"My father entered the hospital?"

"I don't know. I didn't remain to watch."

The story was disappointing. If true, Mr. Parker's disappearance remained as mysterious as ever. Penny was silent a moment and then she asked the woman why she had fled from the cemetery.

"Because I saw a police car parked behind the bushes," the other answered defiantly. "And those detectives chased me, too! I only intended to be helpful and maybe win a reward. Now I want nothing to do with the case. I've told you everything I know."

The woman unlocked the gate and started to enter the grounds.

"You're not Mrs. Deming?" Penny asked quickly.

"Who I am is my own business."

"I suppose the ghost is your own affair too!"

"Ghost? What ghost?"

"You live here, yet you haven't learned that the grounds are haunted?" Penny inquired significantly. "Nearly every night a man in white wanders back and forth in the garden."

"I don't know anything about it!" the woman said nervously. "I'll not answer any more questions either!"

Plainly frightened, she snapped shut the padlock of the gate and fled into the house.

CHAPTER

17

ADVENTURE BY MOONLIGHT

A MOMENT Penny stood gazing at the estate house. She considered climbing the iron fence and trying to gain entrance to the dwelling. Then, deciding that nothing would be achieved by again accosting the strange woman, she returned to the waiting taxi.

"Where to?" asked the cabman.

"It's still the police station," directed Penny, repeating an earlier order. "I have twice as much to report now."

As the cab pulled away, she noticed a movement of curtains at the front of the estate house. Evidently the woman who had fled, was watching.

Joe made a quick trip to Riverview, depositing Penny at the doorstep of Central Station.

"Will you need me any more?" he asked hopefully.

"I may."

"Okay," said Joe, slamming the cab door. "I'll stick around. You know, I kinda like this job."

Once inside the police station, Penny inquired for Chief Jalman. Unable to see him, she asked to speak to the two detectives who had been assigned to her father's case. Both men were away from the building.

"Why not talk to Carl Burns?" suggested the desk sergeant. "He's familiar with the case."

Penny was sent to see a heavy-set man who warmed himself by a steaming radiator. Evidently he had spent several hours in an unheated police car for he stamped his feet to restore circulation.

"Mr. Burns?" inquired Penny.

The man turned, staring at her. Penny returned the stare. She had seen the officer before and the recollection was not entirely pleasant. He was the same officer she had met near Mattie's garage on the night of the blizzard.

"What may I do for you?" he asked.

Uncomfortably aware of the officer's scrutiny, Penny began to tell of her visit to the Williams' garage. She stammered a bit and lost confidence.

"You say you saw some big boxes at the garage," he demanded. "What's so suspicious about that?"

Penny tried to explain about the tunnel of boxes which led to a hidden storage room. Even to her own ears the story had a fantastic sound.

"What you *think* or *surmise* doesn't go in this business!" the officer said rather rudely. "Did you actually see any stolen tires?"

"Well, no, I didn't," Penny admitted. "The door was locked."

"Are you willing to swear out a warrant charging Mattie and her partner with dealing in stolen merchandise?"

"I don't suppose I'd dare do that. I thought if police would investigate—"

"We can't go on suspicions, Miss Parker. We act only on sound evidence."

"Well, it doesn't matter so much about the stolen tires," Penny said desperately. "I have another clue —a really important one. I've found the woman who eluded Detectives Brandon and Fuller at the cemetery!"

"Now we may get somewhere," replied the officer. "Who is the woman? Where did you see her?"

Penny told everything she knew about the woman who had taken her father to Mercy Hospital. Word for word she repeated their recent conversation together.

"I'll turn this evidence over to Detective Fuller," the policeman promised. "He'll probably want to question the woman himself."

"I hope he does it right away," replied Penny. "She may take it into her head to skip out of town."

Officer Burns smiled wearily. "Just trust us to handle the case," he said. "We know our business."

Penny left the station feeling none too satisfied. Al-

though she had nothing against Mr. Burns, she sensed that he did not like her. She wondered if she could depend on him to repeat her story as she had told it.

"If that estate house isn't investigated immediately, I'll do something myself!" she thought.

Joe, the cabman, still waited. Signaling him, Penny regretfully explained that she would have no further use for his services.

"Well, if you change your mind and want to do some more ghost huntin' tonight, just give me a ring," Joe grinned. "My number's 20476."

Penny carefully wrote it down. She then walked to the nearby *Star* building where many matters awaited her attention. There she worked without interruption until late afternoon, taking only enough time to call the police station. Detective Fuller was not available. So far as she could learn, no investigation had been made of the Harrison estate.

Thoroughly annoyed, Penny tramped home to dinner. Only a cold meal awaited her. Mrs. Weems, ill with a headache, had set out a few dishes on the kitchen table, and gone to bed.

"It's nothing," the housekeeper insisted as Penny questioned her anxiously. "I've just worried too much the past few days."

"Let me call Doctor Barnell."

"Indeed not," Mrs. Weems remonstrated. "I'll be all right tomorrow."

Penny brewed a cup of tea and made the housekeeper as comfortable as she could. By the time she had eaten a snack and washed the dishes it was eight o'clock. Debating a long while, she went to the telephone and summoned a cab.

"Number 20476," she requested.

Penny was zipping on her galoshes when the doorbell rang. Without giving her time to answer it, Louise Sidell marched into the kitchen bearing a freshly baked lemon pie.

"Mother sent this over," she explained. "I slipped on the ice coming over and nearly had a catastrophe!"

Carefully Louise deposited the pie on the kitchen table. Cutting short Penny's praise of it, she inquired alertly: "Going somewhere?"

Penny explained that she intended to motor to the Harrison estate.

"Not alone?" Louise demanded.

"I'll have to, I guess. Mrs. Weems is sick, so I can't take her along."

"You could invite me," Louise said eagerly. "I'll telephone mother to come over and stay with Mrs. Weems while we're gone!"

The arrangement proved satisfactory to everyone. Mrs. Sidell came immediately to the house, and very shortly thereafter the girls sped away in Joe's taxicab.

The night was a pleasant one, mildly cold, but with a bright moon.

"Park before you get to the estate," Penny directed the driver. "We don't want to be seen. It might defeat our purpose."

Joe drew up in a clump of trees some distance from the Harrison grounds. He then walked with the girls to the spiked fence. There was no sign of activity.

Two hours elapsed. During that time nothing unusual occurred. No lights were visible inside the house. Even Penny began to lose heart.

"This is getting pretty boring," she sighed. "I don't believe the ghost is going to show up tonight."

"We may have been observed," suggested Louise. "One can see very plainly tonight."

After another half hour had elapsed Penny was willing to return to the cab. The three started away from the fence. Just then they heard a door slam inside the house. Instantly they froze against the screen of bushes, waiting.

"There's the ghost!" whispered Louise.

A figure had appeared in the garden beyond the gate. But the one who walked alone was not a ghost. Plainly he was garbed in street clothes rather than white. Over his suit he wore a heavy overcoat. A snap-brimmed hat was pulled low on his forehead.

Penny could not see the man's face, but the silhouette seemed strangely familiar.

"That looks like Dad!" she whispered, clutching Louise's hand. "It is he! I'm sure!"

"Oh, it can't be—"

Penny paid no heed to her chum's protest. Breaking away, she ran toward the gate.

The man in the garden became suddenly alert. As he heard the approaching footsteps he gazed toward the road. Upon seeing Penny he started to retreat.

"Wait!" she called frantically. "Don't you know me, Dad? It's Penny!"

The words seemed to convey nothing to the man. He shook his head in a baffled sort of way, and walked swiftly toward the house.

Penny ran on to the gate. It was locked, but she vaulted over, landing in a heap on the other side. By the time she had picked herself up, the man had vanished into the house.

"Are you hurt?" Louise cried, hurrying to the gate.

Penny brushed snow from her coat and did not answer.

"That man couldn't have been your father," Louise said kindly. "Do come back, Penny."

"But it was Dad! I'm sure of it!"

"You called to him," Louise argued. "If it had been Mr. Parker he couldn't have failed to recognize your voice."

"It was Dad," Penny insisted stubbornly. "He's being held a prisoner here!"

"But that's ridiculous! Whoever that man is, he could escape from the grounds just as easily as you climbed the gate."

Penny did not wish to believe, yet she knew her chum was right.

"Anyway, I'm going to talk to him," she declared. "Now that I am inside the grounds, I'll ring the doorbell."

Leaving Louise and Joe on the other side of the fence, Penny went boldly to the front door. She knocked several times and rang the bell. There was no response.

"Why doesn't someone answer?" she thought impatiently.

At the rear of the house a door slammed. Suddenly Louise called from the gate: "Penny! A woman is leaving the estate by the back way!"

Penny darted to the corner of the house. The same woman she had met earlier that day had let herself out the rear gate. Holding the skirts of her long black coat, she fairly ran across the snowy fields.

"Shall I nab her?" called Joe, eager for action.

Penny's reply was surprisingly calm.

"No, let her go," she decided. "While that woman is away, I'll get into the house. I think Dad is in there alone, and I'm going to find him!"

CHAPTER

18

THROUGH THE CELLAR WINDOW

PENNY RETURNED to the front porch and rang the doorbell many times. No one came to admit her. She tested the door, finding it locked. Windows above the porch level could not be raised.

"I'll try the back door," she said, refusing to accept defeat.

Louise and Joe followed her to the rear of the dwelling, but remained on the outside of the fence.

As Penny had feared, the back door also was locked. She tested eight windows. Finally she found one which opened into the cellar. To her delight the sash swung inward as she pushed on it.

"Here I go!" she called to Louise. "You and Joe stay where you are and keep watch."

Penny crawled through the narrow opening and swung herself down to the cellar floor. She landed with a thud beside a laundry tub. The room was dark. Groping her way toward a stairway, she tripped over a box and made a fearful clatter.

"I've certainly advertised my arrival!" she thought ruefully.

At the top of the stairway Penny found a light switch and boldly turned it on. The kitchen door was not locked. She opened it and stepped out into another semi-dark room.

A doorbell at the front of the house began to ring. Penny was dumbfounded. Then she became annoyed, thinking that Louise and the cab driver were trying to get in.

Groping her way through the house, she unlocked the door and flung it open.

"For Pity Sakes!" she exclaimed, and then her voice trailed off.

A uniformed messenger boy stood on the porch.

"Mrs. Botts live here?" he asked, taking a telegram from his jacket pocket.

Penny did not know what to answer. Thinking quickly, she replied: "This is the Deming estate."

The messenger boy turned the beam of his flashlight on the telegram. "Mrs. Lennie Botts, Stop 4, Care of G. A. Deming," he read aloud. "This is the place all right."

"But Mrs. Botts isn't at home now."

"I've had a lot of trouble getting here," the boy complained. "Even had to climb over the gate. How about signing for the telegram?"

"Oh, all right," agreed Penny, accepting the pencil.

"I don't know why I didn't think of that idea myself!"

In return for the telegram she gave the boy a small tip. The moment he had gone, she closed the front door and switched on a table lamp.

Penny found herself in a luxuriously furnished living room. The rug underfoot was Chinese, the furniture solid mahogany, hand carved. However, she had no interest in her surroundings. Rather tensely, she examined the telegram. Dared she open it?

"What's ten years or so of jail in my young life?" she cajoled herself. "I'm willing to spend it in Sing Sing if only I can find Dad!"

Penny ripped open the envelope. The message, addressed to Mrs. Lennie Botts was terse and none too revealing:

"HAVE CHANGED PLANS. WILL RETURN THE TWENTY-SEVENTH BY PLANE. PLEASE HAVE EVERYTHING IN READINESS."

The telegram was signed by the owner of the estate, G. A. Deming.

"Today is the twenty-seventh of the month," thought Penny. "This message must have been several hours delayed."

The telegram had provided little information. Evidently the woman who had refused to tell her name was Mrs. Lennie Botts. Regretting that she had

opened the message, Penny tossed it carelessly on the table.

Footsteps sounded on the floor directly above. Penny had taken no pains to be quiet. Nevertheless, her pulse quickened as she heard someone pad to the head of the stairway. A muffled voice called: "Who's there?"

Penny's heart leaped for she was sure she recognized the tones. Fairly trembling with excitement, she darted to the foot of the circular staircase. On the top landing in the heavy shadows stood a man whose face she could not see.

"Dad!" she cried. "I'm Penny."

"Penny?" the man demanded impatiently as if the name meant nothing to him. "Where is Mrs. Botts?"

"Why, she went away."

"And how did you get into the house?"

"Through a cellar window."

"I thought so! Young lady, I don't know what you're doing here in Mrs. Bott's absence. Unless you leave at once I'll summon the police."

Penny was not to be discouraged so easily. She started slowly up the stairway.

"Stand where you are!" the man ordered sharply. "I've been sick, but I'm still a match for any housebreaker. I have a revolver—"

So dark was the stairway that Penny could not know whether or not the man was bluffing. His voice,

startlingly similar to her father's, sounded grim and determined. Knowing that a stranger would have good reason to treat her as a burglar, she was afraid to venture further.

"Dad—" she began.

"Don't keep calling me Dad!" he snapped.

"Who are you?" asked Penny, completely baffled.

"Who am I?" the man repeated. "Why, I'm Lester Jones, a salesman. I room here."

The answer dumbfounded Penny. "Then you're not being held a prisoner by Mrs. Botts?" she faltered.

"On the contrary, Mrs. Botts has been very kind to me. Especially since I've been sick."

Penny's perplexity increased. "But I've seen you wandering in the garden at night," she murmured. "Why do you do it?"

"Because—oh, hang it! Do I have to explain everything to you? My head's aching again. Unless you go away and stop bothering me, I'll call the police."

Penny was completely crushed. She had been so sure that the man was her father! Seemingly she had made a very stupid mistake.

"I'll go," she said quietly.

Retreating down the stairway, she left the opened telegram on the living-room table and switched off the light. Then unlocking the kitchen door, she rejoined Louise and Joe.

"I guess you didn't have any luck," her chum commented, observing her downcast face.

Penny ruefully admitted that the man who had been seen in the garden was Lester Jones.

"I knew he wasn't your father," Louise replied. "You wouldn't listen to reason—"

"All the same, his voice was similar," Penny cut in. "Why, the man even used one of Dad's pet expressions."

"What was it?" Louise inquired curiously.

"'Oh, hang it!' That's the expression Dad uses when he's irritated."

Louise helped her chum over the back fence and guided her toward the parked taxi. Midway there Penny paused to stare up at the dark windows of the second floor.

"Lou!" she exclaimed. "That man must have been Dad even if he didn't know me!"

"Oh, Penny, don't start that all over again," Louise pleaded. "You're only torturing yourself."

"I'm going back!"

"No, we can't let you, Penny."

Louise held her chum's arm firmly. Joe opened the door of the taxi and they pushed her in. Penny protested for a moment, then submitted.

"All right, but we're going straight to the police station!" she announced. "I'll not be satisfied until

that man positively is identified as Lester Jones."

A few minutes later, at the police station, Detective Fuller heard the entire story. It was the first he had learned about Mrs. Botts, for Penny's earlier message had not been delivered by Policeman Burns.

"For that matter, I've not seen Burns today," the detective explained. "I'll go to the estate at once and question the woman."

Again Penny and Louise taxied to the estate, this time trailed by a police car. Detective Fuller broke the padlock on the gate and led the party to the front door.

A light now burned in the living room. To Penny's astonishment, the door was opened by Mrs. Botts.

"Good evening," she greeted the visitors pleasantly.

Detective Fuller flashed his badge. "We want to ask you a few questions," he said. "May we come in?"

With obvious reluctance the woman stepped aside, allowing the party to enter the living room. Penny's gaze roved to the center table. The telegram which she had opened no longer was there.

Mrs. Botts did not offer chairs to the callers. Glaring at Penny with undisguised dislike, she said coldly: "I suppose I am indebted to you for this visit. What is it you want?"

"I understand you have a roomer here," began Detective Fuller.

"A roomer?" Mrs. Botts echoed blankly.

"Yes, a man by the name of Lester Jones."

"Ridiculous! You don't seem to realize that this is the Deming estate."

"Are you an employee here?"

"I am the housekeeper. During Mr. Deming's absence I look after the property. I assure you no one but myself lives in the house at present."

"No roomer ever has stayed here?"

Mrs. Botts drew herself up proudly. "Would Mr. Deming be likely to annoy himself with roomers? He has a very substantial fortune."

"You might try to pick up a few dollars yourself."

"Mr. Deming would not hear of such a thing! He pays me well."

Detective Fuller asked additional questions, trying to learn whether or not the woman was the one who had fled from the cemetery. Mrs. Botts frankly admitted that she had taken Mr. Parker to the hospital, but she denied ever trying to collect a ransom.

"What you say now doesn't agree with your original story," Penny protested. "You admitted to me—"

"I admitted nothing," Mrs. Botts broke in indignantly. "I have no secrets to hide!"

"But I'm sure Mr. Jones is living in this house," Penny said stubbornly. "He's upstairs."

"Indeed?" mocked Mrs. Botts. "Perhaps you'd like to search the house."

"Yes, we would," said Detective Fuller.

Mrs. Botts remained undisturbed. Bestowing upon Penny a look of deep contempt, she motioned toward the stairway.

"Very well, search the house," she invited with cool assurance. "I've told you the truth. You'll find no one here but myself."

CHAPTER

19

A BAFFLING SEARCH

IN SYSTEMATIC, unhurried fashion, Detective Fuller went through every room in the Deming house. The bed chambers, nine in number, were in perfect order. Only Mrs. Botts' suite over the kitchen appeared to have been used recently.

As the search progressed, Penny's bewilderment increased. She knew that Lester Jones had been in the house an hour earlier, yet there was no sign of him. Personally she inspected clothes closets and bureau drawers. Not an article could she find that ever had belonged to her father. She did come upon a white woolen bathrobe. Believing it to be the garment worn by the "ghost" she called it to Detective Fuller's attention.

"Oh, that robe belongs to my employer, Mr. Deming," explained Mrs. Botts.

Penny indicated water stains along the hem which suggested that the garment had been allowed to trail in the snow.

"Sometimes I wear the robe when I go outside to bring in the washing," replied Mrs. Botts. "It is warmer than my coat."

Try as she would, Penny could not trip the woman into making any damaging admissions. Mrs. Botts had changed her original story and would not acknowledge that she had fled from the cemetery. Stubbornly, she maintained that she had told everything she knew about Mr. Parker's disappearance.

"I took him to Mercy Hospital in my employer's car," she repeated to Detective Fuller. "That's the last I saw of him."

"In what condition was Mr. Parker when you left him?" questioned the detective.

"He seemed all right. Perhaps he was a bit dazed."

"Why didn't you report to the police?"

"Because I didn't see the newspapers for a day," Mrs. Botts replied sullenly. "Later I read Miss Parker's offer of a reward."

"Then you did write, requesting me to run the ad in the *Star!*" Penny cried triumphantly.

"No, of course not," Mrs. Botts retorted. "I merely read the item."

Penny knew Mrs. Botts was not telling the entire truth, but to prove it seemed an impossible matter. Neither could she establish that a man who claimed to be Lester Jones had been living in the house. True, Louise and the taxi driver would support her story,

but it would only be their word against Mrs. Botts'. The situation had become hopelessly confusing.

Detective Fuller was not entirely satisfied with the housekeeper's story. "Guess we'll have to take you along to the station for questioning," he concluded.

Only then did Mrs. Botts lose her composure.

"No, don't take me away!" she pleaded anxiously. "My employer is coming home tonight. I just received the telegram. If I'm not here when he arrives, I may lose my job!"

Actually Detective Fuller had little evidence against Mrs. Botts and doubted that he could hold her many hours in jail. Far more might be gained by allowing the woman her freedom and keeping watch of the house.

"We'll let you stay here," he decided after a moment's thought. "However, you'll be wanted for questioning a little later. Make no attempt to leave the premises."

"I won't try to go away," Mrs. Botts promised. "I want to cooperate with the police. All I ask is that my employer, Mr. Deming, doesn't hear of this. I'm innocent and it's not right for me to lose a good job."

Very shortly the party bade the woman goodbye and left the estate. Detective Fuller assigned a policeman to keep watch of the property and then returned to Riverview. Louise and Penny, completely bewil-

dered, left with their driver, Joe, debated their next action.

"Where to?" the cabman inquired. "Home?"

"I suppose so," sighed Penny. "I never was in such a muddle in all my life. What became of that man I thought was Dad?"

"He must have left the house while we were at the police station," Louise declared. "It was a surprise finding Mrs. Botts there too! She must have returned in a hurry after we went away."

"Mrs. Botts got rid of Lester Jones somehow," Penny said with conviction. "Oh, she's a slick one!"

As Joe shifted gears, the girls observed a dark figure approaching the estate from down the road.

"Wait!" Penny instructed the cabman. "Let's see who it is."

A moment later the figure emerged from the shadow cast by a giant tree. Penny was surprised to recognize Mose Johnson. The old colored man carried a basket on his arm and evidently had been doing a little late marketing at the crossroads store.

"Good evening, Mose," Penny greeted him as he approached the cab.

"Evenin', Miss Penny," he beamed, pausing. "I'se suah astonished to see yo' all out dis way. Has yo' been lookin' for dat ghost?"

"I'm afraid I have," Penny admitted ruefully. "I've certainly had no luck."

Mose shifted the market basket to his other hand. "Dat ole ghost ain't been around so much lately," he explained. "I comes by dis spot half an hour ago on my way to de sto' to get some victuals. Dere wasn't no ghost around den either. If dere had a been I'd have seen him, you kin be suah o' dat. I was mighty skittish and ready to make mahself absent in about two shakes."

"And you didn't see a thing?" inquired Penny.

"Well now, I can't rightly say dat," Old Mose corrected. "I didn't see no ghost but I did see a taxicab."

"Ours, I suppose."

"Not dis one, Miss. De cab I see was a yelleh one."

The information interested Penny. "Which way was it going, Mose?" she asked quickly.

"It wasn't goin', Miss Penny. It was standin' right at de gate. Den I sees two dark lookin' white men git out and go into de big house."

"You did?" Penny demanded eagerly. "Then what happened? Did the cab drive away?"

"It waited 'till de two men came back, 'cept when dey comes back dere is three of 'em!"

"Three men?" Penny cried, her excitement mounting. "What did the third man look like, Mose? Think hard! It's very important."

"Well," said Mose, "he was tall and he had something in his hand. A funny lookin' little satchel. I guess you calls it a quick-case."

"You don't mean a brief case?"

"Yes, dat's it," Mose grinned. "Anyways, dey all gits in de taxicab and off dey snorts. And dat's all I sees. Dere wasn't no ghost."

The colored man's rambling information served to confirm Penny's own suspicions. Mrs. Botts had lied. A roomer known as Lester Jones had been held at the house and later hustled away. Perhaps the man *was* her father!

"Mose," she cried, "the person you saw may have been Dad! Did it look like him?"

"Why, now yo' speaks of it, dere was somethin' about dat man dat look like Mr. Parker," the colored man agreed. "Kinda de way he walked. I couldn't see his face cause he kept it sort o' tucked down in his collar."

"All the same, it must have been Dad!" Penny exclaimed. "The brief case practically proves it! Tell me, which way did the cab go?"

"Straight down de road," said Mose, pointing. "But de car's been gone a long time now. If you figures on catchin' dose men, you all bettah be travelin'."

CHAPTER

20

ACCUSATIONS

ALARMED AND excited by Mose Johnson's revelation, Penny glanced about for the policeman who had been assigned to watch the Deming mansion. The officer had taken cover somewhere and was not to be seen.

"Joe, drive as fast as you can to the airplane spotting station!" she ordered the cabman. "I'll telephone the police station from there."

As the taxi bounced along over the frozen road, the girls kept close watch for the yellow cab Mose Johnson had mentioned. They did not expect to overtake it. If the old colored man's story was accurate, the taxi bearing Mr. Parker had left the mansion at least a half hour earlier.

"Dad must have been spirited away immediately after I talked to him!" Penny said. "He's been drugged or something! Otherwise he would have known me."

"But according to Mose, your father must have

gone willingly with those men," Louise returned.

"That's the queer part."

"Of course, you're not certain the man is your father."

"Yes, I am!" Penny insisted. "I was almost sure of it earlier this evening. Now I know! Oh, Lou, something terrible has happened to Dad!"

Louise drew her chum into the hollow of her arm. "Brace up!" she said sternly. "You're not going to cave in now, are you?"

Penny's slumping shoulders stiffened. She brushed away a tear. "Of course I'm not going to cave in!" she replied indignantly. "I'll find Dad—tonight, too!"

Enroute to the airplane spotting station, the cab neither met nor passed any vehicle. Leaving Louise in the taxi, Penny clattered up the tower steps and burst into the overheated room where Salt Sommers was making out a report. Her words fairly tumbled over one another as she told him what had happened.

"Will you notify police for me?" she pleaded.

"Of course," Salt assured her, reaching for a telephone. "My relief's due in five minutes now, so I'll be free to join in the search."

While the photographer waited impatiently for a connection, Penny asked him if he had seen a yellow taxi pass the tower.

"Not since I've been on duty. The cab must have taken another road."

Salt completed the call to the Riverview Police Station and was told that every radio-equipped cruiser in the city would be ordered to watch for the yellow cab. As he hung up the receiver, a low humming sound was heard outside the tower.

"Listen!" commanded Salt. "A plane!"

Distinctly they both could hear the roar of a motor to the eastward.

"That's an unidentified ship," Salt declared, reaching for another telephone. Taking down the receiver he said tersely: "Army Flash," and went on to report the position of the passing airplane.

Penny had gone to the doorway. She could see the wing lights of the passing ship. As she watched, the lights descended in a steep glide.

"Salt!" she called. "The plane is landing!"

The photographer darted to the platform to see for himself. "You're right!" he exclaimed. "It's coming down at the Deming estate!"

"Mr. Deming is due home tonight from the East," Penny added. "That must be his plane."

Salt went inside to complete his report to headquarters. As he rejoined Penny, they saw a man trudging along the road toward the tower.

"My relief," said the photographer. "I'm free to go."

Gathering up his belongings, he followed Penny to the waiting taxicab. There a brief conference was

held. The girls were in favor of searching for the yellow taxi, but Salt pointed out that the chance of finding it was a slim one. He proposed that they return to the mansion and try to force information from Mrs. Botts.

"Detective Fuller had no luck," replied Penny. "She has one story and she sticks to it. Her one fear is that she'll lose her job."

"Then this is the time to make things merry for her!" urged the photographer. "If Mr. Deming just arrived home, we'll toss a few firebrands around and find out what he has to say!"

The suggestion appealed to Penny. From the first she had distrusted Mrs. Botts and felt that police had been entirely too lenient with her.

"All right, let's go!" she agreed. "If Mrs. Botts loses her job, I'm sure it's no more than she deserves."

Joe drove the party once more to the Deming mansion. No policeman was in evidence near the premises. Actually he had gone to the crossroads store to report to his superiors the arrival of Mr. Deming's airplane, but at the moment Penny assumed the man was neglecting his duties.

"If this case ever is solved, we must do it ourselves!" she declared, thumping on the front door. "I'm in no mood to take any slippery answers from Mrs. Botts!"

After a long delay the door was opened by the care-

taker. Recognizing Penny and her friends, the woman sought to lock them out.

"Oh, no you don't!" said Salt, pushing her firmly aside. "We want to see Mr. Deming."

"He's not here," Mrs. Botts replied nervously. "Please leave me alone. Go away!"

Ignoring the plea, Penny, Louise, and the photographer walked boldly into the living room. A fire burned in the grate and there were fresh flowers on the table.

"Where is Mr. Deming?" asked Salt in a loud voice.

Footsteps sounded on the circular stairway. A portly, bald-headed man with a pleasant face came heavily down the steps.

"Did someone ask for me?" he inquired.

"You're Mr. Deming?" asked Salt.

"I am. Flew in from New York about ten minutes ago and was just changing my clothes. What may I do for you?"

"I've been trying to tell these folks you can't see them tonight, Mr. Deming," broke in Mrs. Botts. "You're too tired."

"Nonsense," replied the mansion owner impatiently. "Sit down by the fire, everyone. Tell me what brought you here."

Mrs. Botts began to edge toward the kitchen door. Observing the action, Salt called sharply:

"Don't go, Mrs. Botts. We want to talk to you in particular."

"I've nothing to say," the caretaker retorted tartly.

"Sit down, Mrs. Botts," ordered her employer. "For some reason you have seemed very nervous since I arrived home tonight."

"It was upsetting to get your telegram so late," Mrs. Botts mumbled, sinking down on the sofa.

"Mr. Deming," began Penny, "a great deal has happened here tonight."

"I intended to tell you about it myself," interrupted Mrs. Botts, addressing her employer. "I've not had a chance."

"Be quiet, please," commanded Mr. Deming. "Do continue, Miss—"

"Parker," supplied Penny. She introduced Salt and Louise, then resumed her story.

As the tale unfolded, Mr. Deming listened with increasing amazement. Now and then he focused his gaze upon the crestfallen Mrs. Botts, but he did not speak until Penny had finished.

"This is a very serious charge you have made against my housekeeper," he said then. "Mrs. Botts, what have you to say?"

"There's not a word of truth in it!" the woman cried. "Why, I've worked for you ten years, Mr. Deming. I've been a loyal, faithful servant. Why

should I deceive you by taking a stranger into the house?"

"It does seem fantastic," replied the perplexed Mr. Deming. "Miss Parker, what proof have you that your accusations are true?"

"The proof of my own eyesight," Penny said quietly. "For that matter, a number of persons saw the ghost wandering about the grounds."

Mrs. Botts tossed her head. "I've already explained that part. Frequently when I go outdoors, I put on your old white bathrobe, Mr. Deming. It's warmer than my coat."

"The ghost happened to be a man," Penny said. "And here is something you don't know, Mrs. Botts. I was in this house earlier this evening while you were away. I talked with your mysterious roomer, and I'm satisfied it was my father."

"So *you* were here!" Mrs. Botts cried angrily. "Mr. Deming, this girl opened the telegram you addressed to me!"

"I did indeed," admitted Penny, unabashed.

Mr. Deming arose and walking over to the fire, stood with his back to it. "I confess I don't know what to say," he said. "I've never had reason to distrust Mrs. Botts."

"Thank you, sir." The housekeeper smiled triumphantly.

Penny realized that Mr. Deming was on the verge of swinging to Mrs. Botts' side. So far the interview had gained nothing. She had told the entire story. There was no further information she could add.

"I suppose we may as well go," she said, looking miserably at Salt.

Penny arose. Suddenly her eyes lighted upon a small object lying half hidden between the cushions of the sofa. Before Mrs. Botts realized what she was about, she had pounced upon it.

"Dad's spectacle case!" she cried triumphantly.

Opening the lid, she held up a pair of dark horn-rimmed glasses.

"I'm sure I don't know where the case came from," Mrs. Botts stammered.

"When Dad reads on the sofa at home, he often loses his case between the cushions!" Penny went on excitedly. "Mrs. Botts, you thought you were very clever getting him away from here and removing all the evidence!"

"A salesman who wore glasses was here last week—" the housekeeper began weakly.

"You can't talk yourself out of this," Penny cut her short, "Mr. Deming, let me show you something."

She reopened the lid of the case and pointed to the initials "A. P." engraved in gold letters.

"Anthony Parker," she said impressively. "Dad

had them stamped there because he lost the case so many times. Does this prove my story?"

"It does," said Mr. Deming. Sternly he faced the housekeeper. "Mrs. Botts, you have deeply humiliated me. I shall turn you over to the police."

Mrs. Botts began to weep. Stumbling across the room, she clutched her employer's arm.

"Please don't turn me away from here," she pleaded. "Just give me a chance and I'll explain everything. Please, Mr. Deming! This time I promise to tell the truth!"

CHAPTER

21

MRS. BOTTS' REVELATION

"VERY WELL, tell your story," Mr. Deming bade the housekeeper. "What do you know about Mr. Parker's disappearance?"

"It was just like I said," Mrs. Botts began in an aggrieved voice. "I was driving not far from the railroad station when I saw the auto accident."

"You say you were driving?" Mr. Deming interposed. "In whose car, may I ask?"

"I used yours, Mr. Deming. I didn't think you would care."

"We'll skip that. Go on with your story."

"Well, I saw the accident. A coupe driven by a young man, crowded Mr. Parker's car off the road."

"Purposely?" asked Penny.

"I don't know. Two men were in the car and they were speeding. I read part of the license number too. It was F–215 something."

"Why didn't you give this information to the police immediately?" demanded Mr. Deming.

"I'm trying to explain. I stopped my car—your car, I mean. Mr. Parker seemed stunned so I offered to take him to the hospital. Of course at that time I didn't know who he was."

"Dad didn't seem much hurt?" Penny inquired quickly.

"He had a few scratches, but nothing serious. We started for the hospital. Before we got there Mr. Parker changed his mind and decided he didn't want to go. He asked me to take him to a hotel or a rooming house."

"How strange!" exclaimed Penny. "Why didn't he ask to go home?"

"Because he didn't remember he had a home," Mrs. Botts replied. "I guess the accident must have stunned him. Anyway, he said his name was Lester Jones. Since he wanted a room and was willing to pay, I figured I could bring him here."

"So you turned my home into a hotel," Mr. Deming remarked rather grimly.

"I—I didn't think you would be back this winter. I wouldn't have done it, Mr. Deming, only I needed extra money. My sister in Kansas has been sick and I've had to send her funds."

"Mrs. Botts, I've always paid you well," her em-

ployer responded. "Had you told me you needed more money, I would have assisted you. But go on."

"Well, I brought Mr. Parker here and gave him a room. Right off I noticed how queer he acted. He didn't seem to be sure who he was, and he kept going through some papers he carried in a portfolio, trying to puzzle things out."

"All this while you made no attempt to contact police?" Mr. Deming questioned severely.

"I was wondering what to do when I saw a picture of Mr. Parker in the paper."

"And then you dropped an unsigned letter in my mailbox?" Penny probed.

Mrs. Botts knew that the net was closing tightly about her. Although she tried to slant her story in such a way that she would not appear too much at fault, the facts remained bald and ugly.

"Yes, I left a note at your house," she acknowledged reluctantly. "Later I telephoned and made an appointment to meet you at the cemetery."

"Why didn't you go through with it?" asked Penny. "Were you afraid?"

"I began to realize I might be held for something I never intended to do. Folks started to watch this house. I tried to keep my roomer out of sight, but he'd do such queer things."

"Such as stroll in the garden at night," supplied Penny.

"Yes, I felt sorry for the poor man. He had such dreadful headaches and was so bewildered."

"Evidently you weren't sorry enough to tell him who he was," reprimanded Mr. Deming. "Really Mrs. Botts, I can't understand why you acted as you did."

"I just kept getting in deeper and deeper," the housekeeper whined. "Mr. Parker paid me three dollars a day for his room and board. It didn't seem wrong to take the money as long as he was satisfied."

"Where is my father now?" Penny broke in. "That's the important thing."

Mrs. Botts regarded the girl with a trace of her former arrogance. "I don't know what became of Mr. Parker after he left here," she said coldly.

"You sent him away when you knew Mr. Deming was coming home!" Penny accused. "You thought you could keep the truth from your employer!"

"And I would have too, if it hadn't been for you!" Mrs. Botts flared. "I've not done any harm, but you've made a lot out of it, and now I'll be discharged."

"You are quite right about that," agreed Mr. Deming in a quiet voice. "However, there's far more at stake than a job, Mrs. Botts. Even now you don't seem to realize the seriousness of your offense."

"You won't turn me over to the police, will you, Mr. Deming?"

"It will not be in my hands to decide your fate. I strongly advise you to tell everything you know. Where did Mr. Parker go when he left here?"

"I've no idea." Mrs. Botts covered her face. "Oh, leave me alone—don't ask me any more questions. My head buzzes."

"A taxicab with two men in it was seen at the door earlier this evening," Penny went on relentlessly. "What have you to say about that?"

"They were friends who came for Mr. Parker."

"Your friends?"

"Well, no, I found the names and addresses in Mr. Parker's brief case. They were men in the tire business."

This latest scrap of information fairly stunned Penny. As she well knew, her father's portfolio contained only evidence pertaining to the tire-theft case.

"Who were the men?" she demanded.

"One was named Kurt Mollinberg—Ropes Mollinberg his friend called him. I forget the other."

"Ropes Mollinberg!" exclaimed Salt Sommers who had listened quietly to the story. "Why, he's one of the lowest rats in this town! Connected with the numbers racket and I don't know what else!"

"Why did you summon those men, of all persons?" Mr. Deming questioned.

"Well, I found their addresses in the portfolio. I

had to get rid of Mr. Parker before you came and I was afraid to call his house."

"You're a cruel, heartless woman!" accused Penny. "You sent my father away with two of the most notorious rascals in Riverview. Why, those men have been waiting for a chance to waylay him! They wanted to get possession of vital evidence Dad had in his portfolio."

"I didn't know," murmured Mrs. Botts. "When they came in the taxi, they offered me money."

"And you took it?"

"I tried not to, but they forced it on me."

Penny sprang to her feet. Only by the greatest effort of will could she keep from telling the housekeeper what she thought of her contemptible actions.

"You sent Dad away with those men," she repeated mechanically. "Didn't he realize who they were?"

"I told him they were his friends. I really thought so. He went willingly enough."

Penny was sick with despair. From the first, the situation had been grave, but now there seemed little hope. From Mrs. Botts' story she could only conclude that her father suffered from a brain injury. Even if she were fortunate enough to find him, he would not be likely to recognize her as his daughter.

"Oh, Salt," she pleaded, turning to the photographer. "What are we to do? What can we do?"

His reply though prompt, was not completely reassuring.

"We've already put every policeman in Riverview on the trail of those men!" he answered soberly. "And we'll scour every nook and cranny of this town ourselves! Chin up, Penny! Why, we've only started to fight!"

CHAPTER

22

A PARK BENCH

PENNY AND her friends were heartsick with the knowledge that Mr. Parker had fallen into the hands of ruthless members of the tire-theft gang. The taxi which had borne him away had left the mansion fully an hour earlier. There seemed little likelihood that the trail could be picked up quickly.

"I'll telephone the boys at the newspaper office," Salt offered. "The police too! We'll put a description on the radio. We'll have everybody in Riverview watching for that yellow taxi."

"Call the cab companies too," urged Penny. "We may be able to trace it through the driver."

Salt made good use of the Deming telephone which had not been disconnected during the winter months. While he phoned, Penny ran outside to find the policeman assigned to guard the mansion. She soon returned with him and placed Mrs. Botts in his custody.

"Oh, Mr. Deming, don't let them take me to jail," the housekeeper pleaded. "I didn't mean to do anything wrong."

"Mrs. Botts, I can't help you," her employer returned coldly. "Your offense is a very serious one. The court must decide your fate."

The housekeeper broke into tears again and for several minutes was quite hysterical. When her act moved no one, she resigned herself to the inevitable. Packing a few articles in a bag, she prepared to leave the house in the custody of the policeman.

"I'm sorry about everything," she said as she bade the girls goodbye. "I hope Mr. Parker is found. I really do."

After Mrs. Botts had gone, Penny was too upset to remain quietly in a chair. She longed to join in an active search for the yellow taxi. Common sense told her that the cab undoubtedly had reached its destination, yet she hoped she might pick up a clue.

"By questioning filling station attendants, we may be able to learn which way it went from the crossroads," she urged.

"Come on, then," said Salt.

Joe, faithful as ever, waited in his cab outside the mansion. Penny chose to ride beside him, as the front seat offered an unobstructed view of the road.

The cab turned away from the mansion and swept

down the familiar twisting highway. At the first bend, the bright headlights illuminated a patch of snow along the ditch. Penny thought she saw a small, dark object lying on the ground.

"Stop the car!" she cried.

Joe brought the cab to a standstill a little farther down the road.

Penny leaped out and ran back to the ditch. Lying just at its edge was a leather portfolio. A glance satisfied her that it had belonged to her father.

"Salt! Louise!" she shouted. "I've found Dad's satchel!"

The others came running. By that time Penny had examined the portfolio. It was empty.

"Just as I thought," she muttered. "Those men were after the evidence Dad carried! And they got it, too!"

Salt and Joe examined the snowy ditches for a long distance. There were no footprints. They could only conclude that the portfolio had been thrown from a window of the moving cab. Evidently Mr. Parker remained a prisoner.

"Now that those men have what they want, maybe they'll release Dad," Penny said hopefully. "Don't you think so, Salt?"

The photographer glanced at Joe. Neither spoke.

"You believe they'll harm Dad!" Penny cried, read-

ing their faces. "Maybe I'll never see him again—"

"Now Penny," Salt soothed, guiding her toward the taxi.

The cab rolled on, its tires crunching the hard-packed snow. At the crossroads, they met a police car and hailed it. Penny turned the empty portfolio over to one of the officers, explaining where it had been found.

"Every road is being watched," she was told in return. "The alarm has been broadcast throughout the State, too. If that yellow cab still is on the road, we'll get it."

For an hour longer, Penny and her party scoured roads in the vicinity of Riverview. Many times they stopped at filling stations and houses to inquire if a yellow cab had been seen to pass. Always the answer was in the negative.

"Don't you think we ought to go home?" Salt suggested at length. "For all we know, police may have found Mr. Parker by this time. We'd never learn about it while we're touring around."

"All right, let's go home," agreed Penny.

The taxi turned toward Riverview. Arriving at the outskirts, Joe chose a boulevard which wound through the park. The trees, each limb and twig glistening with ice, were very beautiful.

Penny gazed absently toward the frozen lake where a few boys were skating. Suddenly her gaze fastened

upon a man who sat on a park bench beneath a street lamp. He wore no hat. His overcoat was unbuttoned.

"That man!" she cried. "Salt, it looks like Dad! And it is he! It is!"

The man on the bench had turned slightly so that she was able to see his face.

Joe brought the cab to a halt with a jerk. Penny leaped out, followed by the others. The first to reach the bench, she fairly flung herself headlong at the disheveled man who sat so dejectedly alone.

"Oh, Dad, I've found you at last! How thankful I am you're safe!"

The man on the bench stared blankly at her.

"Who are you?" he asked in a dazed voice.

"Why, I'm Penny—your daughter."

"I have no daughter," the man answered bitterly. "No home. Nothing. Not even a name."

Salt, Louise and Joe reached the bench.

"Who are these people?" the man asked. "Why do they stare at me?"

"Why, Mr. Parker," said Salt, taking his arm. "You remember me, don't you?"

"Never saw you before in my life."

"You're my father—Anthony Parker," Penny said desperately. "You were in a bad accident. Don't you remember?"

"I remember that I was taken by two men in a taxi-

cab. They pretended to be my friends. As soon as we were well away from Mrs. Botts' home, they robbed me of my money and portfolio. Then they pushed me out of the cab. I started walking. I kept on until I came here."

"You're cold and tired," said Salt, trying to guide him toward the taxi.

"Who are you?" Mr. Parker demanded suspiciously. "Why should I let you take me away? You'll only try to rob me—"

"Oh, Dad, you don't understand," Penny murmured. "You're sick."

"Come along, sir," urged Salt. "We're your friends. We'll take you to the doctor."

Mr. Parker planted his feet firmly on the ground.

"I'm not going a step!" he announced. "Not a step!"

"Sorry, sir, but if you're so set about it, we'll have to do it this way."

Salt nodded to Joe. Before Mr. Parker knew what was coming, they caught him firmly by the arms and legs. Although he resisted, they carried him to the cab.

"Take us home as fast as you can!" Penny directed Joe. "Then I'll want you to go for Doctor Greer, the brain specialist. Dad's in very serious condition."

"Serious, my eye!" snorted the publisher. He

struggled to free himself from Salt's grip. "Let me out of here!"

"Dad, everything will be all right now," Penny tried to soothe him. "You're with friends. You're going home."

"I'm being kidnaped!" Mr. Parker complained. "Twice in one night! If I were strong enough to get out of here—"

Again he tried to free himself. Failing, he edged into a corner of the seat and averted his face.

CHAPTER

23

FORGOTTEN EVENTS

IN THE upstairs bedroom, Penny moved with velvet tread. Noiselessly she rearranged a vase of flowers and closed the slat of a Venetian blind.

"You needn't be so quiet," said Mr. Parker from the bed. "I've been awake a long time now."

Penny went swiftly to his side. "How are you feeling this afternoon, Dad?"

"Afternoon?" Mr. Parker demanded, sitting up. "How long have I been sleeping?"

"Roughly, about two days."

Mr. Parker threw off the covers.

"Oh, no, you don't," said Penny, pressing him back against the pillow. "Doctor Greer says you are to have absolute bed rest for several days. It's part of the treatment.

"Treatment for what?" grumbled Mr. Parker. "I feel fine!"

"That's wonderful," declared Penny, with a deep sigh of relief. "I'll have Mrs. Weems bring up something for you to eat."

She called down the stairway to the housekeeper, and then returned to the bedside. Her father looked more like his former self than at any time since the strange motor accident which had caused him to lose his memory. His voice too, was more natural.

"Guess I must have had a bad dream," Mr. Parker murmured, his gaze roving slowly about the room. "I seem to recall riding around in a taxi, and being pushed out into the snow."

"You know where you are now, don't you?" asked Penny.

"Certainly. I'm at home."

Mrs. Weems came into the room bearing a tray of food. Hearing Mr. Parker's words, she looked at Penny and tears sprang to her eyes.

"Doctor Greer was right," she whispered. "His memory is slowly coming back. How thankful I am!"

"What's all this?" Mr. Parker inquired alertly. "Will someone kindly tell me why I am being imprisoned in this bed?"

"Because you've been very, very sick," Penny said, arranging the food in front of him. "You know who I am now, don't you?"

"Why, certainly," replied Mr. Parker indignantly.

"You're my daughter. Your name is—now let me think—"

"Penny."

"To be sure," agreed Mr. Parker, in confusion. "Fancy forgetting my own daughter's name!"

"You've forgotten a number of other things too, Dad. But events gradually are coming back to you. Suppose you tell me your name."

"My name?" Mr. Parker looked bewildered. "Why, I don't remember. It's not Jones. I took that name because I couldn't think of my own. What's wrong with me?"

Penny tucked a napkin beneath her father's chin and offered him a spoonful of beef broth.

"What's wrong with me?" Mr. Parker demanded again. "Am I a lunatic? Can't either of you tell me the truth?"

"You're recovering from a severe case of amnesia," revealed Penny. "The doctor says it was brought on by overwork in combination with the shock of being in an auto accident. Since you were hurt you've not remembered what happened before that time."

"I do recall the auto mishap," Mr. Parker said slowly. "Another car crowded me off the road. The crash stunned me, and my mind was a sort of blank. Then a pleasant woman took me to her home."

"A pleasant woman, Dad?"

"Why, yes, Mrs. Botts gave me a nice room and

good food. I liked it there. But one night a girl broke in—could that have been you, Penny?"

"Indeed, it was."

"When Mrs. Botts came home she was very excited," Mr. Parker resumed meditatively. "She said I had to leave. She hustled me out of the house with two strangers."

"One of the men was Ropes Mollinberg, a member of the tire-theft gang."

"Yes, that was his name!" Mr. Parker agreed. "Speaking of tire thieves, I've been intending to write an editorial for the paper. Penny, please have my secretary come in. I'll dictate the material while it is fresh in my mind."

Mrs. Weems looked slightly distressed. Penny, however, whisked away the tray of food. Getting pencil and paper she again sat down beside her father.

"Your secretary isn't available just now, but I'll take down what you want to say."

Penny could not write shorthand so she only pretended to jot down notes. Mr. Parker led off with a few crisp sentences, then wandered vaguely from one idea to another.

"I can't seem to think straight any more," he complained. "Type that up please and let me see it before it goes to the compositors."

"How shall I sign the editorial?" Penny inquired.

"Why, with my name—Anthony Parker."

Penny jumped up and fairly laughed with joy. "Dad, events are coming back to you! You've just recalled your name and that's a big step forward."

"Anthony Parker," the publisher murmured. "Yes, that's it! Now there's another matter that troubles me. I had a brief case—"

"It was stolen by those men who took you away," Penny supplied eagerly. "Dad, if only you could remember what those lost papers contained, we'd expose the entire tire-theft gang!"

Mr. Parker thought for a long while, then shook his head.

"Mind's a blank, Penny. What does the doctor say? Is there a chance my memory ever will return?"

"Of course," returned Penny heartily. "You've already recalled a number of important things. Me, for instance! Doctor Greer thinks that with rest, events will gradually return to mind. Or another shock, perhaps a blow somewhat similar to the one you had, might bring everything back."

"Well, what are we waiting for?" Mr. Parker joked. "Go get the sledge hammer!"

"It's not that easy, I'm afraid."

"I'm afraid not, either," sighed Mr. Parker wearily. "Guess I'll sleep some more now. I feel pretty tired."

During the days that followed, the publisher made a slow but steady recovery. At first Penny did not

worry him by mentioning how matters had gone at the *Star* office. Only after Mr. Parker was well enough to spend several hours a day at the plant, did she reveal how Harley Schirr had sought to establish himself as editor of the paper.

"That fellow!" exclaimed Mr. Parker in annoyance. "Why, I meant to discharge him and he knew it. I have evidence in my safe showing that Schirr accepted money from a local politician."

"You did have evidence," Penny corrected. "While you were away, Mr. Schirr went through your safe."

Amazed by the boldness of his former employee, Mr. Parker immediately examined the contents of both his desk and strongbox. To his chagrin he found that Penny was right. Every document pertaining to Schirr was missing.

"Well, it doesn't matter," the publisher said philosophically. "He'll never set foot in this office again, nor in any other Riverview newspaper!"

"Dad," said Penny, "I've wondered if Schirr may not be hooked up with the tire-theft gang. What do you think?"

"My poor thinker isn't much good these days. However, I very much doubt it, Penny. Schirr always was a snoop and not above taking money for writing biased stories. My judgment would be that

he has no connection with the Mollinberg outfit."

"If only you could remember what was in your stolen portfolio!" Penny sighed.

"If only I could!" agreed Mr. Parker. "Sometimes I doubt I'll ever fully recover my memory."

"Oh, you will, Dad. You're doing better every day."

Penny seldom spoke of the automobile accident which had caused her father's trouble for the subject was a painful one to them both. Although the publisher had been absolved of all blame, police had not succeeded in tracing the hit-skip driver.

Mr. Parker seemed well and strong. Each day he went to the office for longer and longer periods. Gradually his memory was returning, yet he had been unable to recall data which might bring about the capture of the tire-theft gang. Strangely, he could remember nothing of his intention to call at the State Prosecutor's office. Nor could he disclose a scrap of evidence which had been carried in the stolen portfolio.

"If only Jerry would wire or return from his vacation!" Penny commented anxiously. "I can't understand why he doesn't reply to my message."

The reporter's long absence had caused considerable worry at the *Star* office. Jerry was the one person who could divulge the contents of the stolen port-

folio documents, but repeated wires failed to bring any response.

"Jerry will show up one of these days," Mr. Parker said confidently. "The only trouble is, by that time the higher-ups of the tire-theft gang may have skipped town."

"Dad, can't you remember the men who took you away in the taxi?"

"Only vaguely. I've described them to police as best I can. So far, no action."

Penny was silent for a moment. In her mind she had been turning over a way to bring the crooks to justice. It seemed to her that the men might be identified through Black Market operators with whom they must have dealings.

"Now what are you keeping from me?" inquired Mr. Parker lightly.

"I was thinking about a place known as Mattie Williams' garage," replied Penny. "I've good reason to suspect it deals in stolen tires."

She went on to tell of her recent adventure in the storage room of the garage. The information did not excite Mr. Parker as she had feared it might. Instead, it fired him with a determination to get at the truth of the matter.

"Penny, we'll break our story yet!" he exclaimed, reaching for his hat. "Let's go to Mattie's place now!"

"Unless we actually see the inside of the storage room we'll learn nothing. You may be sure Mattie and her partner won't cooperate."

"We'll get into that room somehow," returned Mr. Parker grimly. "I'll take along a few pet skeleton keys just for luck."

At the Williams' garage an hour later, they found Mattie and Sam busy with repair work.

"Be with you in a minute," the woman called to Mr. Parker.

"No hurry," replied the publisher. "No hurry whatsoever."

He and Penny wandered aimlessly about. Choosing a moment when both Sam and Mattie were inside the office, they slipped unnoticed into the room where the empty boxes had been stored.

"Now show me the tunnel," urged the publisher. "We'll have to work fast!"

Penny swung back the hinged boards of the big box. She led her father between a high aisle of crates to the locked door of the inner room.

"Now if only I have a key that will unlock it!" muttered Mr. Parker.

He tried several. At length one did fit the keyhole, the lock clicked, and he was able to push open the door.

In the little storage room close to the outside building wall were tires of all sizes and description. Some

were new, still wrapped in clean paper. Others appeared slightly used.

"See, Dad!" Penny cried triumphantly. "I was right!"

"We still have no proof this rubber was illegally obtained."

Penny darted forward to inspect a stack of tires which rose half way to the ceiling.

"Here's one that might have come off my car!" she cried. "See! Mine had a tiny cut place where I rammed the maple tree backing out of our garage!"

"All tires look alike, Penny. Without the serial number—"

"I do remember part of it. One was 8910 something."

"Then this isn't your tire," replied Mr. Parker, reading the number. "However, I shouldn't be surprised that these are stolen tires."

Penny held up her hand as a signal for silence.

"Quiet, Dad!" she whispered.

Footsteps had sounded in the tunnel between the boxes. The next instant the door was flung open. Penny and her father stood face to face with Sam Burkholder.

CHAPTER

24

TRICKERY

"WHAT D'YOU think you're doing in here?" demanded Sam Burkholder harshly. "Snoopers, eh?"

"Call us that if you like," retorted Mr. Parker. "How long have you been dealing in stolen tires?"

The shot hit its target. Sam started to speak but no words came. He looked badly frightened. Convinced that his suspicion was correct, Mr. Parker added sternly:

"Naturally, I'll report this to the police. You and your partner will have to face charges."

"Keep Mattie out of this," growled Sam. "She had nothing to do with the tire business."

"So you carried on crooked operations all by your lonesome?"

"I've bought and sold a few tires," Sam said sullenly. "All these government regulations give me a pain. A guy can't make any money these days."

"So you admit you've been doing an illegal business?"

"Maybe," said Sam, watching Mr. Parker craftily. "But what's it to you? I take it you're not a government agent?"

"I'm interested in breaking up a gang of leeches—the men who've been cleaning this town of tires for the past three months."

"Those guys are crooks all right," agreed Sam. "Why the last time they sold me a bunch of tires they charged double. When I wasn't going to take 'em they said, 'Either you do, or else!' "

"Did you deal with Ropes Mollinberg?"

"He's just one of the little fry. What will you give me to spill?"

"Nothing."

"Will you keep Mattie out of this?"

"If she's innocent."

"She is," insisted Sam. "Supposin' I tell you how to get the whole gang, will you forget what you've seen here?"

"I make no bargains with Black Market dealers," retorted Mr. Parker. "Either you tell what you know, or I'll have you and Mattie hauled into court."

Sam Burkholder was silent a moment.

"Okay," he said abruptly. "I've had enough of this business anyhow. I'll tell you what I know, and it won't take me long. I've never seen nor dealt direct with the big shots."

"Then how do you get your tires?"

"A trucker by the name of Hank Biglow delivers them to me."

"Louise and I know that man!" cried Penny. "For whom does he work?"

"I've never asked. But from something Hank dropped I kinda suspect the boys are having a meeting tonight."

"Where?" Mr. Parker demanded eagerly.

"I'll tell you on one condition. You've got to keep Mattie out of this. So far as she knows this garage has been run pretty much on the square."

Mr. Parker was unwilling to make any sort of agreement with the man. Nevertheless, he realized that Sam had it within his power to withhold vital information.

"Very well," he said, "I'll take your word for it that Mattie is innocent. Now where is the meeting to be held?"

"At Johnson's warehouse."

"Isn't that along the river?"

"Yeah, about eight miles from here. The boys will be loading some tires there. If you're willing to take the risk, you may learn something. Meeting's at seven."

Penny glanced at her wrist watch.

"It's after six now!" she exclaimed in dismay. "Dad, if we are to get there in time, we've got to step!"

"Right you are," he agreed.

Before leaving the garage, Mr. Parker telephoned Central Police Station. Without mentioning Sam's name, he revealed a little of what he had learned and requested an immediate investigation of the Johnson Warehouse. Then, intending to meet officers there, he and Penny taxied along the winding river road.

Although not yet seven o'clock, it was darkening fast. The driver switched on headlights, illuminating a long stretch of icy pavement.

"Can't you go faster?" Mr. Parker urged impatiently.

"Don't dare, sir," replied the driver.

Even as he spoke, a crossroads traffic light flashed red. Though the driver applied the foot brake with quick stabs, the car went into a disastrous skid. Out of control, it slid crosswise in the narrow road. The front wheels rolled into a deep, slippery ditch.

"Just our luck!" muttered Mr. Parker.

Several times the driver tried to back the car from the ditch. Failing, he and Mr. Parker pushed while Penny handled the steering wheel. The tires kept spinning and would not grip the ice.

"No use," the publisher acknowledged at last. "We're only wasting time. We need a tow car."

"The nearest house or filling station is at least a mile up the road," volunteered Penny. "I'm afraid we're stalled here until the police car comes along."

They climbed into the taxi and waited. No ve-

hicle of any description came by. With increasing impatience, Mr. Parker looked at his watch.

"It's nearly seven o'clock now!" he exclaimed. "Either the police are waiting farther down the road, or they've taken a different route!"

"What are we going to do?" Penny asked helplessly. "If we sit here much longer we'll miss catching those men at their meeting."

"I don't see what we can do. Maybe our best bet is to walk to the nearest filling station."

Penny suddenly was struck with an idea. "The Riverview Yacht Club is closer!" she cried.

"True, but it's closed for the winter."

"My iceboat is still there," said Penny. "If you're not afraid to ride with me, I could get you to Johnson's Warehouse in nothing flat."

"What are we waiting for?" demanded Mr. Parker.

Leaving the cab driver behind, Penny and her father ran most of the way to the club. The *Icicle*, covered with snow, runners frozen to the ice, remained where it had been abandoned.

"The sail's here too!" Penny declared, burrowing in a box hidden deep in the cockpit. "In this wind, we'll go places!"

"Are you sure you can handle the boat?" Mr. Parker asked anxiously. He had never ridden in the *Icicle* and from his daughter's vivid descriptions, had no great desire to do so.

"I know I can start it going," Penny replied with a quick laugh. "I'll worry about stopping it when the time comes!"

They cleared the little boat of snow and pushed it out on the smooth ice of the river. Penny made certain that all the ropes were free running.

"Now you get in, Dad," she advised as she hoisted the flapping sail. "I want to be sure where you are when the fireworks begin."

The wind filled the big sail like a balloon. Nothing happened. The iceboat did not move an inch.

"Why don't we go?" growled Mr. Parker. "Runners dull?"

Penny gave the boat a hard push.

"Want me to help?" offered her father.

"No, thanks," puffed Penny. "When this baby makes up its mind, it will go so fast you'd be left behind."

Once more she pushed. The sail filled again and the runners stirred.

"It's moving!" shouted Penny.

The *Icicle* was pulling away from her. She clung fast, trying to scramble aboard. Her feet went out from under her and she was dragged over the ice.

"Hang on!" shouted Mr. Parker. "I can't sail this thing alone!"

Penny clung desperately. Away flew a mitten. Her scarf flapped in her face. With a supreme effort,

she pulled herself aboard, and took command of the tiller.

"Are you hurt?" Mr. Parker shouted anxiously in her ear.

Penny shook her head and laughed. "Getting started always is quite a trick," she replied. "Sit tight! We have a stiff breeze tonight."

Penny and her father wore no protective goggles. The sharp wind stung their eyes even though they kept their heads low.

"How'll we know when we get to the warehouse?" Mr. Parker shouted. "I can't see anything!"

"Just trust me," laughed Penny. "All I worry about is stopping this bronco when we get there!"

The boat was moving with the speed of an express train. Penny made her decisions with lightning-like rapidity, twice steering to avoid open stretches of water. She was worried, but had no intention of letting her father know.

The boat raced on. Then far ahead loomed the dark outline of a building.

"That's the warehouse!" shouted Mr. Parker. "Don't go past it!"

Penny gradually slowed the *Icicle*. Approaching shore, she slacked the main sheet and shot up into the wind. By using her overshoes for brakes, she finally brought the boat to a standstill not far from the warehouse.

"Well done, skipper," praised Mr. Parker.

Scrambling from the boat, they glanced anxiously about. A dim light shone from inside the warehouse. Not far from its side entrance stood a truck. There were no other vehicles, no sign of the expected police car.

"Is this the place?" Penny asked doubtfully.

"Yes, it's the only warehouse within a mile. Queer the police aren't here to meet us."

The publisher waded through a shrunken snowdrift to a side door of the building. It was not locked and he pushed it open a crack. Far down a deserted corridor shone a dim lantern light.

"Oughtn't we to wait for the police?" Penny whispered uneasily.

Without answering, Mr. Parker started down the corridor. Penny quickly overtook him, padding along close at his side.

The corridor opened into a large storage room used in years past to house river merchandise. Now the walls were stacked high with tires.

On the ground floor stood a truck which several men were loading. Two others watched the work from a balcony overhead.

"Dad, do you recognize any of those men?" Penny whispered.

"No, but we've evidently come to the right place," he replied.

The men did not talk as they loaded the tires into the truck. For many minutes Penny and her father watched the work.

"That truck soon will be pulling out," Penny observed. "Why don't the police come?"

"I'm going to talk to those men," Mr. Parker decided. "You stay here."

Before Penny could protest, her father stepped boldly into the lighted room. Immediately work ceased. Every eye focused upon him.

"Good evening," said Mr. Parker casually.

The remark was greeted by a suspicious silence. Then one of the men, a red-faced fellow with a twisted lower lip, asked: "You lookin' fer somebody?"

"Just passing through and noticed the light," replied Mr. Parker. "Wondered what's going on."

"You can see, can't you?" growled one of the workmen. "We're trying to load tires. Now get out of here or I'll bounce one on your head! We got work to do."

Mr. Parker did not lack courage. However, the grim faces warned him that the men would not hesitate to make their promise good. With Penny unprotected in the corridor he could afford to take no chances.

"Sorry to have bothered you," he apologized, and retreated.

Penny waited nervously in the dark hallway. "Now what are we to do?" she whispered as her father rejoined her.

"We'll telephone again for the police. Let's get out of here."

Noiselessly they stole from the building. As they huddled in the lee of a brick wall, a car came down the road.

"That may be the police now!" Penny murmured hopefully.

The car turned in at the warehouse. A lone policeman alighted. As he came over to the building, Penny recognized him as Carl Burns.

"Where's the rest of your men?" Mr. Parker demanded. "Surely you don't expect to handle this tire gang single handed?"

"Aren't you a bit mixed up?" the policeman drawled.

"Mixed up?"

"I'm here on a routine inspection. This is a defense plant, or didn't you know?"

"A defense plant!" Mr. Parker echoed.

"A warehouse for one, I should say," corrected the policeman. "Tires intended for the Wilson war plant are earmarked and shipped out from here. A couple of trucks are going out tonight. I'm on the job to see they're not hijacked."

Penny gazed blankly at her father. If the police-

man's information was correct, then they had nearly made a serious blunder.

"Guess we've been tricked," Mr. Parker muttered. "We were told this place operates in the Black Market."

"That's a laugh," responded the policeman. "Who told you that yarn?"

"I can't divulge my source."

"Well, you sure were taken for a ride!" the policeman taunted. "Mr. Parker, why not let the police handle the crooks while you look after your newspaper business? You've not been yourself since you were in that auto accident."

Penny and her father resented the implication, but wisely allowed the remark to pass without comment. Decidedly crestfallen, they bade the policeman goodbye and returned to the iceboat.

"We've made ourselves ridiculous!" Mr. Parker commented bitterly as they shoved off down river. "Taken in by Sam Burkholder!"

"He probably lied to get rid of us," agreed Penny. "By this time he's likely removed every tire from Mattie's garage!"

Mr. Parker nodded and did not speak again. His failure to learn the identity of the key men associated with Ropes Mollinberg, had been a bitter disappointment.

Penny handled the *Icicle* effortlessly and without much thought. Faster and faster the little boat traveled, its runners throwing up a powdery dust.

Then without warning the *Icicle* struck something frozen in the ice. Before Penny could make a move, the runners leaped from the surface. The boat tilted to a sharp angle, and went over.

Penny felt herself sliding. Snow filled her mouth, the sleeves of her coat. Her cap hung over one ear. Laughing shakily, she scrambled to her feet.

"Are you all right, Dad?" she called anxiously.

Then she saw him. Mr. Parker was sprawled flat on the ice a few yards away. He did not move. Terrified, she ran to him and grasped his arm.

"Dad! Speak to me!"

Mr. Parker stirred slightly. He raised a hand and rubbed his head. Slowly he pulled himself to a sitting position.

"Penny—" he mumbled, staring at her.

"Yes, Dad."

"It's come to me—in a flash!"

"What has, Dad?" Penny asked, wondering how badly her father had been stunned.

"Why, all the evidence I had in my portfolio! Names! Pictures! I know every man who was mixed up in the tire deal. Jerry gave it all to me."

"You remember everything?" cried Penny. "Dad,

that's wonderful! It's just like Doctor Greer said. You've regained your memory as the result of a sudden blow."

"Things did seem to rush back to me after I hit my head on the ice."

Gripping Penny's hand, Mr. Parker pulled himself to his feet. Still giddy, he staggered and caught the iceboat for support. Then recovering, he exclaimed:

"We've got to go back there right away!"

"Where, Dad?"

"To the warehouse. We were tricked, but not by Sam Burkholder! Policeman Burns is one of the men I aim to expose!"

CHAPTER

25

FINAL EDITION

PENNY AND her father had no definite plan as they raced toward Johnson's warehouse in the iceboat. Their only thought was to return and somehow prevent the escape of the tire thieves.

"Dad, is Harley Schirr one of the gang?" Penny shouted in Mr. Parker's ear.

"Schirr?" he repeated impatiently. "Of course not!"

"Then why didn't he want you to publish the tire stories in the *Star?*"

"Oh, Schirr's a natural-born coward," Mr. Parker answered. "He likes to snoop and give unasked advice. Let's forget him."

The *Icicle* slowed to a standstill near the warehouse. Penny and her father leaped out and climbed the slippery bank. Nearby they saw a loaded truck about to pull away from the building.

"We never can stop those men now!" gasped Penny.

"Yes, we can!" cried her father. "A police car is coming, and this time it's no fake!"

As he spoke, an automobile bearing the notation, "Police Department" in bold letters, skidded into the driveway. Detective Fuller was at the wheel and at least four policemen were with him.

"Stop that truck!" Mr. Parker shouted. "Don't let it get away!"

Detective Fuller and four companions leaped from the police car. As the loaded truck started off with a roar, they blocked the road.

"Halt!" shouted Detective Fuller.

When the order was ignored, he fired twice. The bullets pierced the rear tires of the truck. Air whistled out and the rubber slowly flattened.

For a few yards the truck wobbled on, then stopped. Two detectives leaped for the cab.

"All right, get out!" ordered Detective Fuller, covering the men.

The truck driver and two others slouched sullenly out of the cab. As flashlights swept their faces, Penny recognized one of the men.

"Hank Biglow!" she identified the driver.

"And this man is Ham Mollinberg, a brother of Ropes," said Mr. Parker, indicating a red-faced fellow in a leather jacket. "The man beside him is Al

Brancomb, wanted for skipping parole in California."

"Any others in the warehouse?" demanded Detective Fuller.

"There should be," said Penny excitedly. "Where's Mr. Burns?"

"What Burns do you mean?" questioned one of the detectives.

"Connected with your police force, unfortunately," informed Mr. Parker. "That's why I planned to consult the Prosecutor before I spread the story on the *Star's* front page. You boys have done good work in Riverview and I didn't want to make the department look bad."

"Burns, eh?" Detective Fuller repeated. "We'll find out what he has to say!"

The policeman, however, was not to be apprehended so easily. Four men, including Ropes Mollinberg, were captured inside the warehouse. Burns had left the building some minutes earlier and had returned to Riverview.

"Don't worry, we'll get him!" Detective Fuller promised Mr. Parker. "How about these other eggs? Can you identify them?"

"They're all members of the outfit," the publisher said without hesitation. "One of my reporters, Jerry Livingston, spent weeks watching these men and getting wise to their methods."

"Then he can testify against them."

"He can if he gets back," agreed Mr. Parker. "Jerry's in Canada and for some reason we've been unable to locate him."

Penny and her father remained at the warehouse until the handcuffed prisoners had been taken away. They were jubilant over the capture. Not only would the tire-theft gang be broken up, but the *Star* had achieved another exclusive front-page story.

"The best part of all is that you've recovered your memory!" Penny declared to her father. "After this, you won't dare fuss when I tell you I'm going ice-boating!"

"You're right," agreed Mr. Parker. "The *Icicle* is the best pal I ever had!"

Within an hour after Penny and her father left the warehouse they were notified that Mr. Burns had been taken into custody. Evidence piled up rapidly against the policeman. As it definitely was established that he had accepted money from Ropes Mollinberg, he was stripped of his badge and put behind bars.

Police were not compelled to search the Williams' garage. Before they could act, Sam Burkholder came voluntarily to Central Station, offering to make a clean breast of his part in the Black Market dealings. Both he and Mattie were held as witnesses against the tire thieves.

"Will Mattie be kept in jail long?" Penny asked her father.

"I doubt it," he replied. "Apparently, Sam acted alone in selling illegal tires. Since he's showing a disposition to cooperate with police, he'll probably escape with a heavy fine."

With the tire theft case soon to come up for trial, Penny was disturbed lest Jerry Livingston fail to return from Canada in time to testify. For many days she tormented herself with wild speculations. Then one afternoon her worries were brought to an end by the arrival of a telegram. Nothing had happened to the young reporter. He had failed to reply to messages only because he had been out of touch with civilization.

In his wire, Jerry stated that he would return to Riverview at once to aid in the search for the publisher.

"Jerry doesn't know yet that you've been found!" Penny said to her father. "We must wire him right away to set his mind at rest."

The message was sent, and within a few hours a reply arrived, addressed to Penny.

"COMING ANYWAY," it read. "AM BRINGING YOU A BEAR RUG TOGETHER WITH A NICE BEAR HUG."

As if pleasant surprises never would end, still another came Penny's way. Police notified her that among the tires seized at the Johnson Warehouse was a set of five belonging to her stripped car.

"You're much better off than I," Mr. Parker teased her. "Your car now is in running order again. Mine will be in the garage for many a day. I'll have to pay my own repair bill, too."

"Unless the hit-skip driver is found."

"I'm afraid he never will be," sighed Mr. Parker. "I'll always believe the men who crowded me off the road were hired by the tire-theft gang. No way to prove it though."

"The car license number Mrs. Botts gave police didn't seem to be accurate," Penny replied. "By the way, have you decided what you'll do about her?"

"Mrs. Botts?"

"Yes, so far you've placed no formal charge against her."

Mr. Parker smiled as he reached for a final edition of the *Star*. The paper carried not only an account of the round-up at Johnson's Warehouse, but a full confession from Mrs. Botts.

"I bear the woman no ill will," he said. "She's already lost her position as caretaker at the Deming estate. That's punishment enough as far as I'm concerned."

Presently Mrs. Weems entered the living-room with a glass of milk. When she tried to make the publisher take it he complained that he no longer was an invalid.

"Now drink your milk like a good lad," Penny scolded. "Why, you're still as thin as a ghost."

With a wry face Mr. Parker gulped down the drink.

"Let's not speak of ghosts," he pleaded. "I'm well now, and I don't like to be reminded of those disgraceful night-shirt parades."

"Are you sure you're perfectly well?" teased Penny.

"Of course I am. My memory is as good as it ever was!"

"Haven't you forgotten a rather important financial item?"

Mr. Parker looked puzzled. Then light broke over his face.

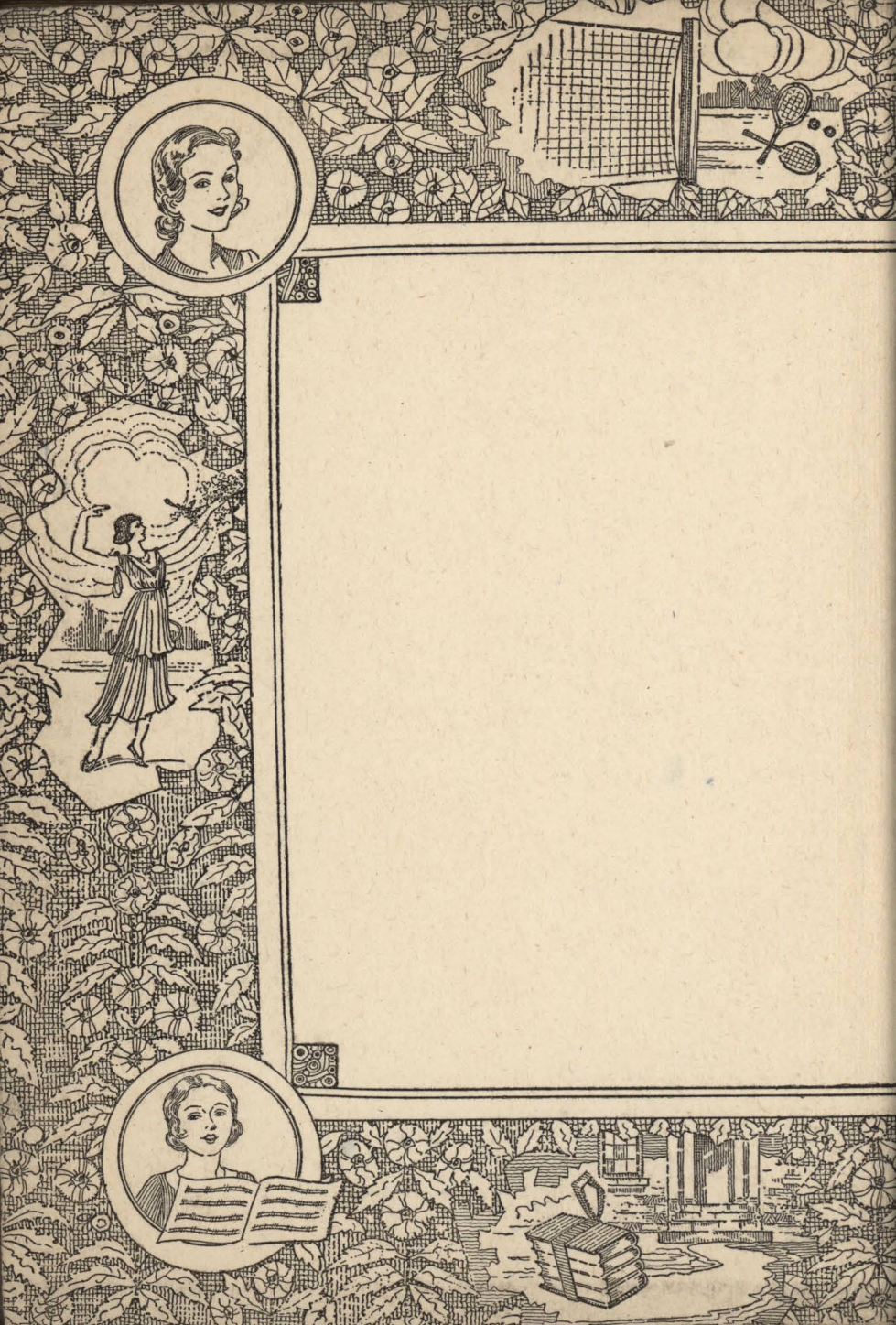
"Your allowance! I've not paid it for a long while, have I?"

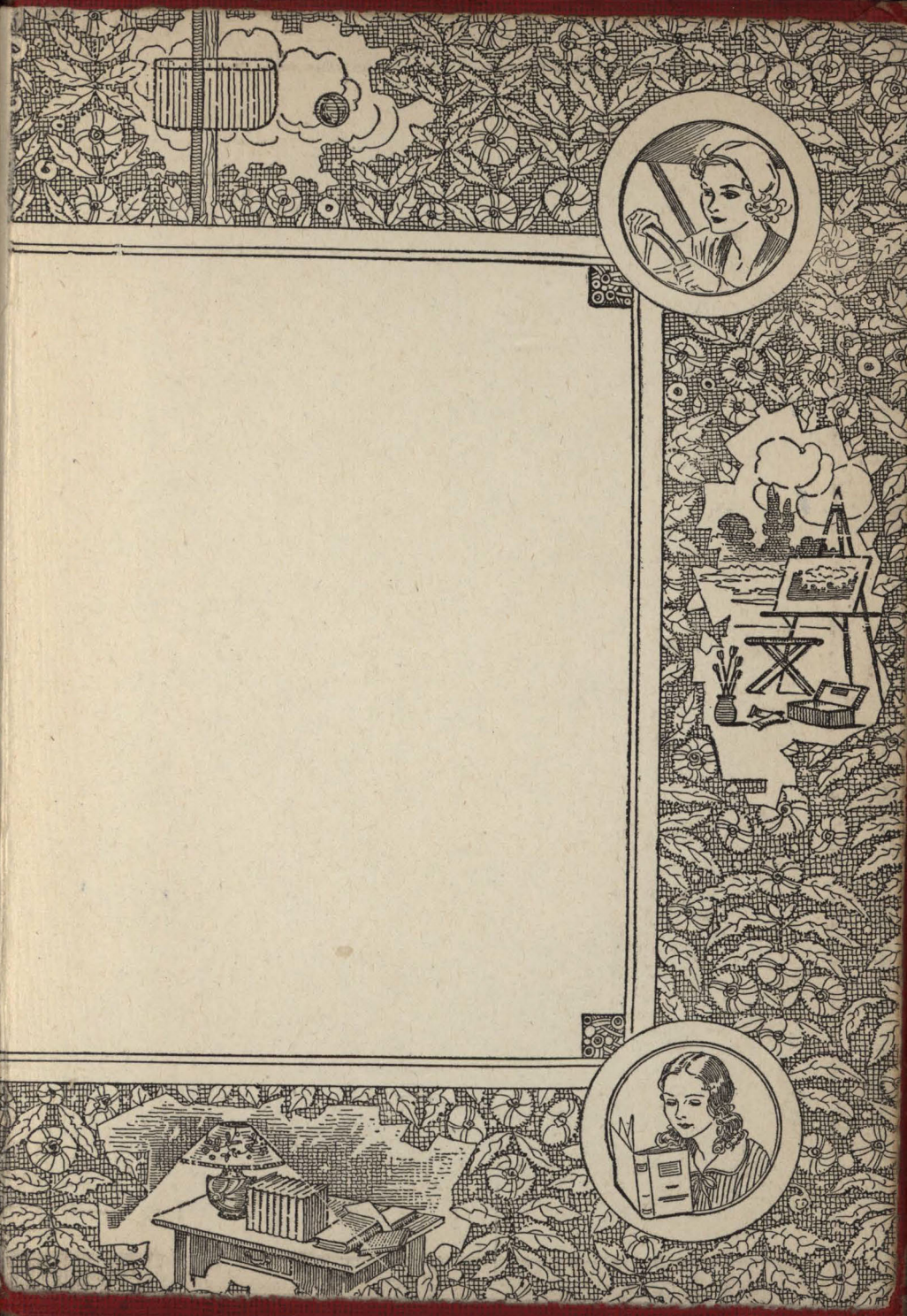
"You certainly haven't," grinned Penny. "The old till is painfully empty. I can use a little folding money to good advantage."

Her father smiled and opened his pocketbook. "Here you are," he said. "Go out and paint the town red!"

When Penny thumbed over the little stack of "folding money" she drew in her breath. Then she leaped to her feet in youthful exuberance.

"Oh, Dad, you're a darling!" she cried. "Why, this will buy a brush and a whole barrel of red paint! Look out, Riverview, here I come!"





GHOST BEYOND *the* GATE

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